VASSILI GROSSMAN

THE YEARS OF WAR

(1941–1945)

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE
MOSCOW 1946

Translated from the Russian
by
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Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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1941

AUGUST

EARLY one summer evening in 1941 heavy guns could be seen moving along the road to Gomel. The guns were so enormous that even the blasé baggage train crews, who had seen everything there was to see, kept glancing at the huge steel barrels with interest. Dust hung thickly in the evening air, faces and uniforms were grey, eyes inflamed. Only a few of the artillerymen were marching, most of them were riding on the guns. One man was drinking water from his steel helmet, the drops trickling down his chin, his moist teeth glistening. Glancing at him casually you might have thought that he was clowning, but he was not—his face was thoughtful and drawn with fatigue.

"Ai-ir-craft!" came the long-drawn-out shout of the Lieutenant marching at the head of the column.

Two planes were darting over the oak grove in the direction of the road. The men followed their flight apprehensively, exchanging comments:

"They're ours!"

"No, they're German."

And the usual frontline joke was cracked:

"They're ours all right—where's my helmet!"

The planes were heading at right angles to the road, which meant that they were ours. German aircraft usually turned on spotting a column and flew parallel to the road.

Powerful tractors hauled the guns through the village street. The great guns barging through the peaceful twilight of the countryside looked weird and out of place among the whitewashed cottages with their miniature front gardens full of crinkly golden balls and red peonies flaming in the rays of the setting sun, among the women and greybeards sitting in front of their houses, amidst the lowing of cows and the barking of dogs.

Near a small bridge that groaned painfully under the fearful, unaccustomed burden passing over it, stood a car, waiting for the artillery column to pass. The driver, who was obviously used to such halts, grinned as he watched the soldier drinking from his helmet. The Battalion Commissar sitting beside him kept craning his neck to see whether the end of the column was yet in sight.

"Comrade Bogarev," said the driver with a strong Ukrainian accent, "perhaps we'd better stop the night here, it'll be dark soon."

The Battalion Commissar shook his head.

"We've got to hurry," he said. "I must get to Headquarters."

"We'll never be able to make these roads in the dark, and we'll have to spend the night in the woods in any case," said the driver.

The Battalion Commissar burst out laughing:

"What's the trouble? Did you get a sudden hankering for a drink of milk?"

"A drop of milk and some nice fried potatoes wouldn't be half bad."

"Not to mention goose," said the Battalion Commissar.

"Why not?" retorted the undaunted driver enthusiastically.

Soon the car was passing over the bridge. Flaxen-haired urchins ran after it.

"Hey! Take these cucumbers, take these tomatoes, take these pears!" they shouted, tossing handfuls of cucumbers and green pears through the half-lowered windows of the car.

Bogarev waved to the youngsters and felt a cold wave of emotion flood his heart. The sight of the village children seeing off the Red Army as it withdrew was sweet, but it was bitter at the same time.

Before the war, Sergei Alexandrovich Bogarev had been a professor, holding the chair of Marxism-Leninism at one of the Moscow institutes. Research work fascinated him, and he tried to devote as few hours as possible to lecturing. His main interest was the scientific research work that he had begun about two years previously. He used to come home for supper from the institute and pull out a manuscript from his brief case to read while he was at the table. When his wife would ask him whether he liked what he was eating, whether the omelette was salted enough, he would answer something quite beside the point. She would fume and laugh at the same time, while he would say to her: "You know, Lisa, I had a wonderful day of it today—I read a letter of Marx's which was only recently discovered in an old collection."

And now Sergei Alexandrovich Bogarev was Assistant Chief of the Political Department of one of the fronts. Occasionally he would recall the cool vaults in which the institute's manuscripts were kept, the table littered with all sorts of papers, the shaded lamps, the squeaking

of the wheels on the ladder that the librarian moved about from shelf to shelf. Sometimes fragmentary phrases from his unfinished book would float into his mind and he would muse on the questions that interested him so deeply and so vitally.

The car sped along the road. Sooty dust, brick dust, yellowish dust, fine grey dust—making one's face like that of a corpse—clouds of dust hang over these roads at the front. This dust is raised by hundreds of thousands of Red Army boots, truck wheels, tank tracks, tractors, guns, flocks of sheep and droves of pigs, the hoofs of collective-farm horses and great herds of cows, collective-farm tractors and the creaking carts of refugees, the bast sandals of collective-farm foremen and the dainty shoes of girls leaving Bobruisk, Mozyr, Zhlobin, Shepetovka, Berdichev. Dust hovers over the Ukraine and Byelorussia, dust curls over Soviet soil. At night the sombre August sky flushes with the sinister glow of village fires. The thunderous roar of exploding bombs rumbles through dark oak and pine forests, through quivering aspen groves; red and green tracer bullets stitch the heavy velvet of the sky; anti-aircraft shells burst aloft like white stars; Heinkels loaded with high explosives drone monotonously in the towering gloom. And the old men and women in the villages and hamlets who see the soldiers off say to them: "Drink some milk, ducky . . . eat this cheese . . . take these pies, sonny . . . a few cucumbers for the road." Old eyes weep and weep, searching for the face of a son amidst the thousands of dusty, grim, weary faces. And the old ladies who hold out little bundles of goodies tied in white napkins beg the men: "Take it, take it, honey; you are all as dear to our hearts as our own children."

The German hordes were moving from the west. On the German tanks are daubed the skull and crossbones, red and green dragons, wolf maws and fox tails, antlered reindeer heads. Every German soldier carries in his pocket photographs of conquered Paris, devastated Warsaw, shamed Verdun, burned Belgrade, captured Brussels and Amsterdam, Oslo and Narvik, Athens and Gdynia. In every German pocket are photographs of German women and maidens in bangs and curls, wearing striped pyjama trousers. On every German officer are gold amulets, strings of coral by way of charms, stuffed mascots with yellow bead eyes. In every German officer's pocket is a Russian-German military conversation manual with the brief phrases: "Hands up," "Halt, don't move," "Where are the guns?" "Surrender." Every German soldier has learned the words: "Milk," "bread," "eggs,"

and the curt phrase: "Hand over, hand over." They marched from the west.

And millions of people rose to encounter them—from the bright Oka and the broad Volga, from the muddy waters of the Kama and the foaming Irtysh, from the steppes of Kazakhstan, from the Donbas and Kerch, from Astrakhan and Voronezh. Millions of loyal workers' hands dug anti-tank ditches, trenches, bunkers, pits; the rustling groves and forests silently laid thousands of their trunks across highways and quiet country lanes; barbed wire tangled around factory yards; iron bristled into anti-tank barriers on the squares and streets of our lovely green towns.

Sometimes Bogarev was surprised at the ease with which he had been able to cut short his former mode of life, suddenly, in the course of a few hours; it pleased him to know that he had retained his power of judgment in difficult situations, that he could act resolutely and swiftly. And most important of all he saw that there, too, in the midst of a war, he had preserved his integrity and his ideals, that people trusted him, respected him and sensed his inherent power. But in spite of this he was not satisfied with what he was doing. It seemed to him that he was not close enough to the Red Army men, to the hub of the war, and he wanted to leave the Political Department for the actual firing line.

He frequently had occasion to interrogate German war prisoners, N.C.O's for the most part. He noticed that the burning hatred for fascism which tortured him day and night changed during the questionings into contempt and disgust. In the majority of cases the prisoners proved a cowardly lot, promptly and eagerly told him the number of their units and gave information about their armaments, roundly asserted that they were workers, that they sympathized with Communism and had served prison terms for their revolutionary ideas, and in one voice would say: "Hitler is *kaput, kaput,*" although it was quite clear that they actually did not believe their own words.

Only rarely did he come across a fascist war prisoner who flatly maintained his loyalty to Hitler and his belief in the superiority of the German race, whose mission it was to enslave the other peoples of the world. Bogarev would question such prisoners in detail: they had read nothing and were not only ignorant of such names as Goethe and Beethoven, but had never heard of even such pillars of German statesmanship as Bismarck or such famous military men as Moltke and

Schlieffen. All they knew was the name of the secretary of their district branch of the National-Socialist Party.

Bogarev made a close study of the orders of the German Command and noted in them an extraordinary propensity for organization—the Germans looted, burned and bombed methodically and in organized fashion; they could organize the collection of empty tin cans in bivouacs and could elaborate a plan for the most intricate movement of a huge column, providing for all the innumerable details and carrying them out punctually and with mathematical precision. In their capacity for mechanical obedience, for blind goose-stepping, in the complex and tremendous movement of millions of soldiers fettered by unthinking discipline, there was something degrading, something foreign to the free spirit of man. This was no culture of reason, but a civilization of instincts, something in the nature of the organization of ants and herds of cattle.

In all the German correspondence that Bogarev had examined he had found only two letters—one from a young woman to a private, the other a letter which a private had been about to send home—wherein he found a glimmer of thought devoid of automatism, and feeling devoid of the usual middle-class vulgarity, letters filled with shame and sorrow for the crimes that were being committed by the German people. Once he had questioned an elderly officer who had formerly been a teacher of literature, and this man, too, had proved to be a person who thought, and who cherished a sincere hatred for Hitlerism.

"Hitler," he told Bogarev, "is no minister to the common weal; he is a plunderer. He has plundered the industrial culture of the diligent and zealous German people like any common gangster."

"Never," thought Bogarev, "never will they conquer our country. The more accurate their calculations in trifles and details, the more mathematical their movements, the greater their helplessness in understanding what is most important, the more overwhelming will be the catastrophe which awaits them. They plan trifles and details, but they think in two dimensions. They are unaware of the laws of historical movement in this war they have started, nor is it possible for these people of instinct and vulgar utilitarianism to grasp them."

His car sped through chill dark woods, over little bridges spanning winding streams, through hazy valleys, past quiet ponds reflecting the starry flame of the vast August sky. The driver said quietly:

"Comrade Battalion Commissar, remember that soldier who was drinking from his helmet, sitting on the gun back there? You know, it just occurred to me that it was my brother, no other; now I know why I was so interested in him!"

MILITARY COUNCIL

BEFORE THE MEETING of the Military Council of the Front, Divisional Commissar Cherednichenko went for a walk in the park. He strolled slowly along, stopping now and again to fill his short-stemmed pipe. Passing by the old palace with the gloomy tower and the clock that did not go, he went as far as the pond. A thick green mane of branches hung down over the water. The swans on the pond gleamed dazzlingly in the morning sunlight. It seemed as though they were moving so slowly and holding their necks so rigidly because the dark green waters were too thick and turgid for them to cleave. Cherednichenko stood still, looking thoughtfully at the white birds. The wet gravel crunched under his jackboots. A rather elderly Major with a dark beard was coming down the avenue from the direction of the signals office.

Cherednichenko knew him—he was from the Operations Branch and had reported to him on the situation once or twice.

"Might I have a word with you on an official matter, Comrade Cherednichenko?" said the Major in a loud voice.

"Certainly, what is it?" answered Cherednichenko, his eyes following the swans, who were making for the opposite bank, frightened by the Major's loud voice.

"Information has just been received from the Commander of the 72nd Rifle Division."

"From Makarov, that is?"

"That's right, from Makarov. It's very important information. He reports that yesterday at twenty-three hours the enemy began moving large formations of tanks and mobile infantry. Prisoners stated that they belonged to three different divisions of Guderian's Tank Army and that they were given the direction of the movement as Unecha-Novgorod-Seversk."

"Well," said Cherednichenko, "I knew that last night."

The Major looked curiously at his lined face with the large yet narrow eyes. The Divisional Commissar's eyes were much lighter than the weather-beaten skin of his face, which had known the winds and the

frosts of the Russo-German war in 1914 and the campaigns in the steppes during the Civil War. He looked calm and thoughtful.

"May I go, Comrade Cherednichenko?" asked the Major.

"Give me the latest operations report from the central sector."

"The operations report with information to four nought nought hours. . . ."

"Hm," said Cherednichenko, "four nought, nought. . . . Couldn't possibly have been three fifty-seven hours, could it?"

"Possibly, Comrade Cherednichenko," smiled the Major. "There's nothing much in the report. On the other sectors of the front the enemy were not particularly active. Only that they had occupied the village of Marchikhina Buda to the west of the river crossing, losing about a battalion and a half in the action."

"What village?" asked Cherednichenko turning to the Major.

"Marchikhina Buda."

"You're certain?"

"Absolutely certain."

The Major was silent for a moment and then said in a guilty voice:

"Beautiful swans, Comrade Divisional Commissar. Two of them were killed in an air raid yesterday. Their young were left."

Cherednichenko lit his pipe again, blowing out a cloud of smoke.

"May I go?"

Cherednichenko nodded.

The Major turned on his heel and went off in the direction of H.Q., passing the old maple under which Cherednichenko's orderly was standing. The Divisional Commissar looked long at the swans, vivid patches of light on the green surface of the pond. Then he said softly:

"Oh, mama, Lenya, shall I ever see you again?" and he coughed with the hard, dry cough of a soldier.

As Cherednichenko walked back to the palace with his usual unhurried gait, the waiting orderly asked him:

"Shall I send the car for your mother and son, Comrade Divisional Commissar?"

"No," answered Cherednichenko shortly; then, seeing the look of astonishment on his orderly's face, he added: "Last night the Germans occupied Marchikhina Buda."

The Military Council met in a high domed hall, the long, narrow windows of which were draped with portières. In the half light the

tasselled red table-cloth looked black. About fifteen minutes before the conference was due to begin, the secretary on duty walked noiselessly across the carpet and whispered to the orderly:

"Murzikhin, have they brought the apples for the Commander?"

"I gave the usual instructions and ordered Narzan water and 'Severnaya Palmyra' cigarettes too. Here they come," answered the orderly in rapid tones.

An orderly came into the room with a bowl of green apples and a few bottles of Narzan water.

"Put it down over there, on the little table," said the secretary.

A few minutes later the Chief of Staff entered, a General with a tired and dissatisfied look on his face. Following him came a Colonel, Chief of the Operations Branch, carrying a roll of maps.

The Colonel was a tall, thin man with a ruddy complexion, the General stout and pale. But somehow they looked remarkably alike. Turning to the orderly, who was standing stiffly to attention, the General asked:

"Where is the Commander?"

"On the wire, Comrade Major-General."

"Is the connection through?"

"It was put through twenty minutes ago."

"There you are, Pyotr Yefimovich," said the Chief of Staff, "and your precious Stemekhel said he'd put us through only by noon."

"So much the better, Ilya Ivanovich," replied the Colonel, and with the severity expected of a subordinate under such circumstances, he added: "When are you going to get some sleep? This is already your third sleepless night."

"Well, you see, with the situation as it is one simply doesn't think about sleep," said the Chief of Staff, as he walked over to the little table and helped himself to an apple. The Colonel spread his maps out on the big table and also reached out for an apple. The orderly, standing to attention, smiled, and exchanged glances with the secretary.

"Here it is," said the Chief of Staff, bending over the map and staring at the thick blue arrow indicating the direction of the German tank column within the red semicircle of our defensive line. He frowned as he studied the map. Then he bit into the apple and grimacing wryly exclaimed:

"Sour as hell!"

The Colonel also took a bite of his apple and said hurriedly:

"I'll say they are! Pure vinegar!" Turning to the orderly he snapped: "Can't you get any better apples than those for the Military Council? Simply outrageous!"

The Chief of Staff laughed:

"Don't start arguing about tastes, Pyotr Yefimovich. That's the Commander's special order, he likes sour apples."

They bent over the table, conversing in low tones.

"Our main line of communication is threatened. The enemy's objective is quite clear. Just look here; they're outflanking us on the left," said the Colonel.

"Hm, outflanking," said the General. "Shall we say: a potential threat of an outflanking movement."

They put the bitten apples on the table and sprang smartly to attention as Yeremin, the Commander-in-Chief of the Front, entered the room. He was a tall, spare man with close-cropped greying hair. His boots clattered noisily as he came in, for he did not walk on the carpet like everybody else, but on the brilliantly polished parquet floor.

"Good morning, comrades, good morning," he said, and glancing at the Chief of Staff, asked: "Why are you looking so fagged out, Ilya Ivanovich?"

The Chief of Staff, who usually addressed the Commander by his first name and patronymic, Victor Andreyevich, at this time, just before the meeting of the Military Council, answered loudly:

"I feel fine, Comrade Lieutenant-General. May I report the situation?"

"Let's have it," said the Commander, and added: "Ah, here comes the Divisional Commissar."

Cherednichenko nodded as he came into the room and sat down in the chair at the farthest corner of the table.

"Just a minute," said Yeremin and opened a window. "I think I told you to open the windows," he said sternly to the secretary.

The situation, as reported by the Chief of Staff, was extremely serious. The spearheads of the German fascist army were driving into both flanks of our troops, threatening them with encirclement. Our units were withdrawing to new lines. At every river crossing, on every bit of hilly terrain there were fierce battles. But the enemy pressed on and we retreated. The enemy occupied towns and vast territories. Every day the fascist radio and press reported fresh victories. Fascist

propaganda was delirious with joy. Even in our own midst there were people who did not see beyond the irrefutable fact that the Germans were advancing while the Soviet forces were retreating, and these people were utterly downcast, despairing of the future. The *Völkischer Beobachter* carried screaming headlines printed in red; jubilant speeches resounded in fascist clubs; German wives prepared to welcome home their victor husbands. It all seemed to be a matter of days, or at the most, of weeks.

The Chief of Staff, who was reporting, his assistant—the Colonel—the secretary, the Commander, the Divisional Commissar, all saw the heavy blue arrow aimed at the heart of the Land of the Soviets.

To the Colonel the arrow seemed terrible, swift, tireless in its movement across the ruled paper. The Commander knew more than the others about reserve divisions and regiments, about formations still far back in the rear but moving up from east to west; he had a marvellous feeling for the battle line; he could sense, physically, all the unevenness in the terrain, the precariousness of the German pontoons, the depth of the fast flowing streams, the sponginess of the swamps where he would meet the German tanks. To him war was not just something worked out on the grid of a map. He fought on Russian soil, with its dense forests, with its morning mists, with its uncertain light at eventide, with its fields of thick uncut hemp and tall waving wheat, with its hayricks and barns, its tiny hamlets on their steep river banks, its deep gullies overgrown with bushes. He could feel the countless miles of village roads and winding lanes, the dust, the winds, the rains, the blown-up country stations, the torn-up tracks at railway junctions. And the blue arrow neither frightened nor agitated him. He was a General, cool and calm, who knew and loved his country, who knew and loved the art of warfare. Only one thing he wanted—offensive action. But he was retreating, and that distressed him.

His Chief of Staff, professor in the Military Academy, had all the attributes of a scientist. He was an expert in military tactical methods and strategic decisions, thoroughly versed in the history of military science and fond of drawing analogies between the operations conducted by the armies at the front and the battles of the twentieth and nineteenth centuries. His was a vivid imagination, with nothing of the dogmatic about it. He was extremely sober in his appreciation of the ability of the German High Command to manœuvre, of the

mobility of the fascist infantry and the skilful co-operation between enemy air and ground forces. The retreat of our armies stung him to the quick; it seemed to him that the blue arrow was directed at his own heart, the heart of a Russian soldier.

The Colonel, who was Chief of the Operations Branch, thought in terms of military topography. The only reality he knew was the gridded map, and he always remembered the exact number of map sheets that had replaced one another on his table, and exactly what lines had been traced by the blue and red pencils. To him it seemed that war was conducted on maps, prosecuted by staffs. To him the blue arrows indicating the progress of the German mobile columns emerging on the flanks of the Soviet armies moved in accordance with the mathematical laws of scales and speed. In this movement he could not see the operations of any laws other than those of geometry.

The calmest of them all was the taciturn Divisional Commissar, Cherednichenko. The "Soldiers' Kutuzov" was the nickname he had been given. During the hottest moments of battle, there was always an atmosphere of extraordinary calm around this unflurried, slow-moving individual with the thoughtful, rather sad face. His witty, laconic repartee, his sharp and incisive words were often recalled and repeated. Everybody knew his broad-shouldered, stocky figure. He would often be seen strolling along slowly, puffing away at his pipe thoughtfully, or sitting on a park bench, deep in thought, his forehead slightly wrinkled, and every commander and soldier felt happy and lighter of heart when he saw this man with the high cheekbones, screwed-up eyes and furrowed brow, his short pipe clenched between his teeth.

During the Chief of Staff's report, Cherednichenko sat with his head bowed, and it was impossible to tell whether he was listening attentively, or thinking of something else. Only once did he get up, walk over to the Chief of Staff and look at the map.

When the report was finished, the Commander asked a number of questions of the General and the Colonel, glancing every now and then at the Divisional Commissar in the expectation that he would take part in the discussion

The Colonel kept taking his fountain pen out of his tunic pocket, trying the nib on the palm of his hand and putting it back again. Over and over again he did this. Cherednichenko watched him closely. The Commander was walking up and down the room, the floor resounding

under his heavy tread. He was frowning. The movement of the German tanks was enveloping the left flank of one of his armies.

"Listen here, Victor Andreyevich," the Divisional Commissar said suddenly, "from childhood you've been used to the green apples you stole from your neighbours' orchards, and now other people have to suffer because of you." He pointed to the table. Everybody looked at the apples with the bites taken out of them and laughed.

"You mustn't put out only green ones," said Yeremin, "it really is a bit thick."

"Very good, Comrade Lieutenant-General," said the secretary smiling.

"What have we here?" said Cherednichenko, and going up to the map he asked the Chief of Staff: "You intend to dig in on this line?"

"On that line, Comrade Divisional Commissar. Victor Andreyevich is of the opinion that the means of defence at our disposal can be actively and most effectively utilized here."

"That's true," said the Commander. "The Chief of Staff proposes that the best way of carrying out the manœuvre would be to launch a counter-attack in the vicinity of Marchikhina Buda and to retake the village. What do you think about it?"

"Retake Marchikhina Buda?" repeated Cherednichenko, and there was something in his voice that made everybody look up at him. He puffed at his pipe, blew out a cloud of smoke, waved the smoke away with his hand, and stood for some time in silence looking at the map.

"No, I object," he said at last, and moving the stem of his pipe over the map he began to explain why he thought the operation inadvisable.

The Commander dictated an order strengthening the troops on the left flank and reorganizing Samarin's army group. He issued orders for one of the infantry units which he had in reserve to be moved up against the German tanks.

"And I'll give them a good Commissar," said Cherednichenko, signing the order after the Commander.

Just then came the deafening roar of a bursting bomb, immediately followed by a second. They could hear the steady volleys of the AA guns and the muffled drone of German bombers. The Chief of Staff said angrily to the Colonel:

"And in a couple of minutes the ARP people will wake up and sound the alert."

Cherednichenko turned to the secretary and said:

"Comrade Orlovsky, please send for Bogarev."

"He is here, Comrade Divisional Commissar. I meant to tell you as soon as the meeting was over."

"Good," said Cherednichenko, and, as he left the room, asked Yeremin: "You agree with me about the apples?"

"Yes, yes, of course I agree," answered the Commander. "Apples of all sorts."

"Don't forget now," said Cherednichenko and walked to the door accompanied by the smiling General and Colonel. At the door he turned to the Colonel: "I say, Colonel, you shouldn't twiddle that pen of yours about so much. What do you do it for? How can you entertain even the slightest doubt? It won't do, you know. We'll lick the Germans."

Orlovsky, the secretary of the Military Council, thought he knew people, but he could never understand the Divisional Commissar's feeling for Bogarev. Cherednichenko was an old soldier who had been in the Russian Army for nearly twenty years, and he was always somewhat sceptical of commanders and commissars who were called up from the reserve. Bogarev was an exception which the secretary could not understand.

Cherednichenko was a changed man when he talked to Bogarev. Not a trace remained of his habitual taciturnity. Once he talked to Bogarev in his office almost the whole night through. The secretary could hardly believe his ears when he heard the Divisional Commissar carrying on such an animated, lengthy and voluble conversation, asking questions and then launching forth again. When the secretary went in, the two men looked wrought up although apparently they were not arguing, but simply discussing some matter of vital importance to both of them.

This time the Divisional Commissar did not smile as usual when he saw Bogarev, who sprang to attention as he approached, but went up to him with an almost stern expression on his face and pronounced, in a voice such as the secretary had never heard him use before, even on the most solemn occasions:

"Comrade Bogarev, you are appointed Military Commissar of an infantry unit which the Staff has entrusted with an important task."

Bogarev said:

"I thank you for your confidence in me."

A CITY IN THE TWILIGHT

BEFORE THE WAR Semyon Ignatiev, a tall, powerfully built private in the 1st Rifle Company, had lived on a collective farm in the Tula Region. His draft papers had come at night, when he was sleeping in the hayloft, at the very hour, as it happened, that Bogarev had been called up on the telephone and told to report the next day at Headquarters of the Political Department of the Red Army. Ignatiev liked to reminisce with his comrades: "I was certainly seen off in style! My three brothers from Tula, who work in an arms' factory, came at night with their wives. And the chief mechanic from the machine-and-tractor station came. We wet our whistles plenty and did we sing!" Looking back on it now, it seemed to him that his send-off had been all fun and hilarity, but actually it had not been easy for him to see his weeping mother or the bold front that his aged father had tried to put on. "See, Senka," said the old man, "here are two silver crosses, and I had two more gold ones that I put into a war bond. Your old father was a sapper and blew up a bridge together with a whole regiment of Germans." And although the old man made a brave showing, still it was evident that he would have liked to cry together with the women—Semyon was the favourite of his five sons, the jolliest and the most affectionate.

Semyon was engaged to be married to Marusya Pesochina, the daughter of the collective-farm chairman. She had been taking a course in accountancy in the town of Odoyev and was expected home after the first of July. Her friends, and especially her mother, warned her against Senka Ignatiev, whom they considered a very gay and frivolous young man. He was a great one for singing and dancing, was fond of a drink, liked to step out and seemingly couldn't be seriously in love with a girl or be true to her for long. But Marusya would answer her friends: "I don't care what you say, girls, I love him so much that when I just look at him my hands and legs go cold and I get the shivers."

When the war broke out, Marusya asked for two days' leave and walked some thirty kilometres in a single night in order to see her sweetheart. She came home at dawn and learned that the conscripts had left for the station the day before. Thereupon, without stopping to rest, Marusya walked another eighteen kilometres to the railroad station where the men were. There she was told that the conscripts had

gone off in a troop train, but as to where they went no explanation was given. "That is a military secret," an important looking lieutenant said officiously. Marusya's strength immediately left her and it was all she could do to make her way to the home of a woman acquaintance who was working as a cashier in the station baggage room. That evening her father came for her and took her home.

Semyon Ignatiev became popular throughout the regiment. Everyone knew this strapping, jolly, tireless young man. He was a splendid worker, and whatever the tool he took up, it seemed literally to dance and cut capers in his hands. He had the amazing knack of working with such ease and so gaily that anyone who so much as glanced at him for a moment wanted himself to take up the axe, saw, shovel, or whatever it was, in order to work as smoothly and well as Semyon Ignatiev. He had a good voice and he knew many old songs, songs that he had learned from Granny Bogachikha.

This Granny Bogachikha was extremely unsociable, never allowing anyone to enter her house, and sometimes letting as much as a month go by without saying a word to a soul. She would even go to the well for water at night in order to avoid meeting the village women, who annoyed her with their questions. And everyone was amazed and wondered why she had immediately made an exception of Senka Ignatiev, telling him folk tales and teaching him songs.

For a time Semyon had worked together with his elder brothers in the famous Tula plant, but he had soon thrown up the job and returned to the village. "I can't stand being cooped up," he said. "I must have the free air. It's like bread and water for me to tramp around in the country. And in Tula the ground's all stone." He often wandered through the neighbouring fields, tramped about in the great forest or went down to the river. He would take a fishing rod with him or a rickety old shot gun, but he did this mainly for appearance's sake, so that people would not make fun of him. He would usually walk at a brisk pace and then stand quietly and listen to the birds, shake his head, sigh and walk on. Or he would clamber up the high hill whose slope was covered with brushwood and overlooked the river, and there he would sing the songs he knew. And his eyes would dance as merrily as a drunken man's. In the village they would have thought him queer and people would undoubtedly have laughed at these walks with the gun, but he was very much respected for his strength and for his tremendous capacity for work. He liked practical jokes, could drink a

great deal and held his liquor well, related interesting incidents, or told amusing stories, and was generous with his tobacco. In the company everyone took a liking to him immediately, and Mordvinov, the gloomy Sergeant-Major, once said to him somewhat admiringly and yet somewhat reproachfully: "Ekh, Ignatiev, yours is a real Russian soul!"

He made particular friends with two of his buddies—the Moscow fitter Sedov and the Ryazan collective farmer Rodimtsev. The latter was a stocky, dark-complexioned man of thirty-six. He had left a wife and four children behind.

Of late their unit had been kept in reserve on the outskirts of the city. Some of the men were billeted in abandoned houses. There were many such houses in the city, as over 100,000 of the 140,000 inhabitants had left for the interior. The factories too had left the town—an agricultural machinery plant, the car repair works and a large match factory. The silent factory buildings, the smokeless stacks, the deserted streets of the workers' settlement, the blue stands where so recently ice cream had been sold were melancholy sights. In one of these stands the sentry controlling the traffic with his batch of coloured flags would sometimes take shelter from the rain. In the windows of the deserted houses stood all sorts of faded plants—rubber plants, their heavy leaves drooping, withered hortensias and phlox. Under cover of the trees lining the streets, frontline trucks were camouflaged, and armoured cars painted green and yellow rolled through the deserted playgrounds with their golden sand piles, honking in the piercing, raucous voice of birds of prey. The suburbs had suffered greatly from air bombardments. People passing through to the city stared at the charred warehouse with the enormous sign on its smoke-blackened walls: "Inflammable."

But the restaurants, a little factory making soft drinks and the barbershops were still doing business in the city. Sometimes after a rain, when the leaves would be glistening and the puddles splashing gaily, when the air would be soft and pure, for a few seconds people would imagine that the great sorrow that had overtaken the country did not exist, that there was no enemy only fifty kilometres away from their homes. The girls would exchange glances with the Red Army men, old men would lower themselves complainingly to benches on the boulevards, while the children played in the sand that had been piled up in readiness to extinguish incendiary bombs.

Ignatiev liked this green, semi-deserted city. He did not feel the terrible sorrow that overwhelmed the people who had remained behind. He did not notice the tear-reddened aged eyes that peered anxiously into the face of every passing soldier. He did not hear the quiet weeping of the old women, did not know that hundreds of old men did not sleep nights, but stood at their windows and stared into the darkness with tear-filled eyes. Their pale lips moved in whispered prayers as they bent over their daughters, who were sleeping uneasily, weeping and crying out in their sleep, over their moaning and tossing grandchildren, and then again they would turn to the window trying to guess the direction in which the trucks were moving through the murk.

At 10 p.m. the men fell in at the sound of the alert. In the dark the drivers started up their cars, the motors humming softly. The inhabitants came out into the street and silently watched the Red Army men falling in. Looking like a thin child, an aged Jewess with a heavy warm shawl over her head and shoulders asked the men:

"Tell me, comrades, are we to go off or are we staying?"

"Where will you go, mother?" the jolly Zhavelev asked her. "You must be ninety, you won't be getting very far on foot."

Sorrowfully the old woman nodded her head. She stood near a truck, with the blue light of the headlights falling on her. With the corner of her shawl she was carefully polishing the mudguard of the machine as if it were a passover dish, cleaning away the caked mud. Ignatiev noticed this movement and pity suddenly touched his young heart. As if she sensed this sympathy on his part, the old woman burst into tears:

"What am I to do, what am I to do? Tell me, you are leaving, comrades, yes?"

The roaring of the motors as they started up drowned out her feeble voice and unheard by anyone she murmured softly:

"My husband is lying paralysed. Three of my sons are in the Army, the last left for the People's Guard yesterday. Their wives have gone away with their factory. What am I to do, comrades, how can I go, how can I go?"

Just then the Lieutenant came out into the street and called over Ignatiev.

"Ignatiev," he said, "three men are to stay here until morning to accompany the Commissar. You're one of them."

"Yes, Comrade Lieutenant," said Ignatiev briskly.

Ignatiev wanted to spend that night in the city. He was very much taken up by Vera, a young refugee who worked as a scrub woman in the editorial office of the local newspaper. She came off duty after eleven and Ignatiev usually waited for her at this time in the yard. She was tall, black-eyed, full breasted. Ignatiev liked sitting next to her on a park bench. He would sit quite close to her while she would sigh and tell him in her soft Ukrainian voice about her life in Proskurov before the war, how she had left one night on foot, running away from the Germans, taking with her only a single dress and a bag of rusks, leaving her old folks and younger brother at home, about how dreadfully they had bombed the bridge over the Sozh when she had been walking with a column of refugees. All her conversation was about the war, about the killed on the wayside, about the death of children, about villages in flames. An expression of desolation was ever in her black eyes. When Ignatiev put his arm around her she pushed it away and asked:

"Why do you do that? Tomorrow you'll go your way and I'll go mine. You won't remember me and I'll forget you."

"Well, what of it," he would say. "And perhaps I won't forget."

"No, you'll forget. If you'd met me earlier you would have heard how I can sing, but now I haven't the heart for it."

And she persisted in pushing away his hand. All the same Ignatiev liked sitting with her and was always hoping that she would change her mind and be nice to him. He rarely thought of Marusya Pesochina now; he felt that once a man was fighting it was no great sin if he did love some pretty girl on the way. When Vera spoke he did not listen very attentively, but kept gazing at her dark brows and eyes, and inhaling the fragrance that came from her skin.

One after the other the cars drove down the street, setting off in the direction of the Chernigov Highway. It was a long time before the last car passed the bench on which Ignatiev was sitting. Then the town suddenly became quiet, dark, still; only the grey beards of the old men and the white hair of the old women gleamed at the windows.

The sky was starry and tranquil. Once in a while a falling star would flash, and the men would imagine that this star was a plane that had been shot down. Ignatiev waited until Vera came up and talked her into sitting down beside him on the bench.

"I'm very tired, soldier boy," she said.

"Just for a little while," he coaxed. "After all, I'm leaving tomorrow."

And she sat down beside him. He gazed into her face in the darkness and she seemed to him so pretty and desirable that his breath came with difficulty. And indeed she was extremely pretty.

AN ALERT

BOGAREV was sitting at his desk plunged in thought. His meeting with Mertsalov, Regimental Commander and Hero of the Soviet Union, had made an unpleasant impression on him. The Commander had been civil enough and attentive, but Bogarev had not liked his self-satisfied tone.

Getting up, he walked over and knocked at the door of the next room, where the permanent occupant of the flat lived.

"Have you gone to bed yet?" he asked.

"No, no, come in," replied a hurried, elderly voice.

His host was an old lawyer, now living on a pension. Bogarev had had several long discussions with him. He lived in a large room, with bookshelves lining all the walls, and old periodicals strewn about everywhere.

"I've come to say goodbye, Alexei Alexeyevich," said Bogarev. "I'm leaving tomorrow."

"Is that so," said the old man. "I'm sorry. In these grim times fate gave me the very person I've wished for all these long years to talk things over with. No matter how long I may still live I shall always remember our evening conversations with gratitude."

"Thanks," said Bogarev. "I've something I'd like to give you—a packet of Chinese tea—I know you're fond of tea."

He gripped Alexei Alexeyevich's hand and returned to his own room. In the short time since the war he had already managed to read through some dozen books on military subjects—many special works summarizing the experiences of the great wars of the past. Reading was as necessary to him as eating and drinking.

But this night Bogarev did not read. He wanted to write to his wife, to his mother, to his friends. Tomorrow would begin a new phase in his life, and he doubted whether he would be able in the near future to keep up a correspondence with those dear to him.

"My dear," he began to write, "at last I have been given the

appointment about which I dreamed—remember I spoke of it before I left. . . ."

He became lost in thought, staring at the lines he had written. His wife, of course, would be upset by this appointment of which he had dreamed. She would spend sleepless nights worrying. Need he tell her about it?

There was a knock at the door. A Sergeant-Major came in.

"May I speak to you, Comrade Battalion Commissar?" he asked.

"Go right ahead! What is it?"

"A truck's remained behind, Comrade Commissar, and three men. What are your orders?"

"We leave at 8 a.m. The car is being repaired. I'll go on the truck. By evening we'll catch up with the regiment. For the time being don't let anyone leave the yard; all the men are to sleep together. Check up on the car yourself."

"Yes, Comrade Commissar."

The Sergeant-Major evidently wanted to say something else.

Bogarev regarded him questioningly.

"The thing is, Comrade Battalion Commissar, searchlights are playing all over the sky and I suppose they'll be sounding an alert soon."

The Sergeant-Major went into the yard and called softly:

"Ignatiev!"

"Here," Ignatiev replied in a grumpy voice and went over to the Sergeant-Major.

"You're to stick here in the yard."

"Yes, I'm stuck here all right," said Ignatiev.

"I don't know where you're stuck! All I know is that it's the Commissar's orders that you're to stick in the yard."

"Yes, Comrade Sergeant."

"Now, how's the car?"

"It's O. K."

The Sergeant-Major looked up at the beautiful sky, at the dark, brooding houses, and said with a yawn:

"Listen here, Ignatiev, if anything pops you wake me."

"Yes, Comrade Sergeant," said Ignatiev, and thought to himself: "What's he sticking to me for! If only he'd beat it and go to sleep!"

He went back to Vera and quickly embracing her whispered something angrily and hotly in her ear.

"Oh, you!" she replied. But this time she did not remove his hand, and even returned his embrace.

"You don't understand a thing," she whispered. "I'm afraid to love you. I could forget anyone else, but you I shan't forget. I've got enough to cry over without having to cry over you too. As it is I never dreamed there were so many tears in my heart."

Ignatiev did not know what to answer, nor did she need an answer, and he began to kiss her.

The wail of a distant siren followed by a second and a third at regular intervals was carried through the air.

"Warning," she said ruefully, "another warning."

And immediately the tattoo of anti-aircraft guns came to them from the distance. The rays of the searchlights crept slowly over the sky, as if they feared to prick their slim blue bodies on a star; and the bright white bursts of anti-aircraft shells twinkled among the stars.

THE DESTRUCTION OF A CITY

THE DAY will come when the peoples will sit in judgment; the day when Hitler's fox-face, his narrow forehead and sunken temples, will be dragged into the light of the disgusted sun; and a man with fat, pendulous cheeks—the gang leader of the fascist air force—will sit heavily by Hitler's side in the dock.

"Death," will be the verdict of the old women whose eyes have gone blind with weeping.

"Death," will be the call of the children orphaned by battle and conflagration.

"Death," will be the cry of the women mourning lost sons and daughters. "Death, in the name of love and life!"

"Death," will echo from the soil these men have defiled.

"Death," will rise from the ashes of razed towns and villages.

And the German people will stand horrified, transfixed by the gaze of contempt and reproach with which the world regards them. Ashamed and horrified, the German people will cry, "Death! Death!"

A hundred years from now, historians will shudder as they read the orders so methodically drawn up by the German High Command for execution by the commanders of air squadrons and detachments. Who wrote those orders? Beasts, or lunatics? Or perhaps it was not

living beings who wrote them, but the iron claws of calculating machines?

The German air raid began around midnight. The first planes flew over at a high altitude, dropping flares and several sticks of incendiary bombs. The stars began to fade and disappear as the white globes of the flares, dangling from their parachutes, blazed up in the air. Calmly, thoroughly, meticulously the dead light illuminated the squares of the city, its streets and byways. The whole sleeping city woke in this light—the white plaster figure of the boy raising a bugle to his lips in front of the Pioneer Palace, the glistening windows of bookstores, the flickering red and blue lights in the glass bottles standing on the druggists' shelves. The dark leaves of the tall maples in the park suddenly emerged from obscurity, each fretted leaf distinctly outlined, and the silly young rooks began to caw excitedly, amazed at the unexpected appearance of day. Light shone on the billboards with the advertisement of a puppet show, on the curtained windows with their flower boxes, on the columns of the city hospital, on the gay signboard over the public dining room, on hundreds of gardens and benches, on thousands of roofs; the round windows in attics brightened timidly, and amber stains crept across the polished parquet floor of the reading room in the public library.

There the sleeping city lay in the white light of the flares, a city in which tens of thousands of old folks, children and women lived, a city which had been growing for nine centuries, in which three hundred years ago a seminary and a white cathedral had been built, a city in which generations of rollicking students and skilled craftsmen had studied and worked. In days gone by, long trains of oxcarts used to make their way through this city, while bearded raftsmen slowly floated past its white houses, crossing themselves as they gazed at the dome of the cathedral; a glorious city which had forced the thick damp woods to retreat, a city where from century to century famed coppersmiths, cabinet makers, tanners, bakers, tailors, masons and painters had worked. This beautiful ancient city on the banks of the river was lit up in the dark August night by the chemical light of flares.

Forty twin-engine bombers had been ready since day for the raid. With the precision of chemists the German mechanics had filled the fuel tanks with translucent, light liquid. Dark olive explosive bombs and silver incendiaries at ratios established by military scientists

for bombing cities had been attached to the bomb racks of the planes. The Oberst had familiarized himself with the exact plan of the flight as prepared by Headquarters, and the meteorologists had sent in checked weather reports. The pilots—all of them young dandies with fashionable haircuts—had munched on their chocolate, smoked cigarettes, and sent home briefly scribbled comic postcards.

The planes whined as they came over. They were met by the stabbing fire of anti-aircraft guns; searchlight cones caught them, and soon one of the planes was in flames. Like a broken pasteboard toy it whirled round and round as it came hurtling down, now enveloped in a swaddling of smoky flame, now wriggling out of it. But the German airmen had already seen the sleeping city lit up by the flares.

One after the other explosions bellowed over the town. The very ground trembled; shattered glass flew from windowpanes; plaster showered down in the houses, and doors and windows flew open. Half-clad women with children in their arms ran to the shelters.

Seizing Vera's hand Ignatiev ran with her to a trench dug near the fence. The few remaining residents of the house were already there. The old lawyer in whose apartment the Commissar lived came slowly into the yard, carrying a bundle of books tied up with twine. Ignatiev helped him and Vera into the trench and ran towards the house himself. Just then the sound of a falling bomb came to his ears. He dropped to the ground. The whole yard was plunged into a turbid haze; fine brick dust from the crashing building next door filled the air.

A woman shrieked: "Gas!"

"What are you babbling about!" exclaimed Ignatiev angrily. "It's dust; you just sit there in your trench."

He ran into the house. The Sergeant-Major and the men were already awake and pulling on their boots in the glow of the fires that had been started. The aluminium mess tins sparkled in the light of the young and as yet smokeless flames. Ignatiev glanced at his comrades, who were quickly and silently dressing, then at the mess tins and asked:

"Did you get my grub?"

"Now, then, brother," said Sedov, "you sit around on benches with a jane, counting the stars while we get your grub for you, is that it?"

"Come on, now, snap into it!" said the Sergeant-Major. "And you, Ignatiev, run over to the Commissar, we have to wake him."

Ignatiev ran up to the second floor. The old building groaned with the howl of the bursting bombs—the doors squeaked as they swung back and forth, the dishes clattered alarmingly in the cupboards, and it seemed as if the whole ancient house, where so many people had lived, was trembling all over, like a human being, at the sight of the horribly swift destruction of others of its species.

The Commissar was standing at the window. He did not hear Ignatiev come in. A new explosion shook the earth; plaster thudded heavily to the floor, filling the room with dry dust. Ignatiev sneezed. Still the Commissar heard nothing as he stood at the window gazing out on the city.

"There's a Commissar for you," thought Ignatiev, and an involuntary feeling of admiration arose in him.

In this tall, motionless figure intent on the fires that were beginning to blaze up, there was something strong, magnetic.

Slowly Bogarev turned around. An expression of intense and dogged concentration was stamped on his whole face; his gaunt cheeks, dark eyes, compressed lips—all were tense and strained.

"Stern as an ikon," thought Ignatiev as he looked at the Commissar.

"Comrade Commissar," he said, "you ought to get out of this place, he's dropping his bombs quite close by—one direct hit and there'll be nothing left of the house."

"What's your name?" asked Bogarev.

"Ignatiev, Comrade Commissar."

"Comrade Ignatiev, tell the Sergeant-Major my orders are to assist the civilian population. Listen to how the women are shrieking."

"We'll help, Comrade Commissar. As for putting out the fires, there's not much you can do there. The houses are mostly wooden and dry. He's setting them ablaze by the hundred and there's no one to put them out. The young civilians have either evacuated or gone off with the People's Guard. There are only old people and children left."

"Remember this, Comrade Ignatiev," said the Commissar suddenly, "this night, and this city, and these old people and children."

"As if anyone could forget, Comrade Commissar."

Ignatiev looked at Bogarev's gloomy face and repeated:

"You're right, Comrade Commissar, quite right..." Then he asked: "Perhaps you'd allow me to take that guitar that's hanging on the wall. In any case the house will burn down, and the men like to hear me play on the guitar."

"But the house is not on fire," said Bogarev sternly.

Ignatiev glanced at the big guitar, sighed and left the room. Bogarev put his papers into his field case, put on his trench coat and cap, and once again walked over to the window.

The city was in flames. Wreaths of crimson smoke, shot through with sparks, were rising high into the air. A lurid brick-red glow flickered over the market place. Thousands of flames—white, orange, yellow, cranberry-red, bluish—rose over the city like a huge shaggy cap. The leaves of the trees shrivelled and withered. Pigeons, rooks and crows rose into the hot air. Their homes too were burning. The metal roofs were incandescent with the terrific heat, and the blood-red iron rumbled and crackled dully. Smoke poured from the windows filled with flower pots. Milk white, dead black, rosy and ash grey it curled and spouted, rose high, together with fine golden sprays and reddish streams, or burst forth in a single huge cloud as if suddenly expelled from a giant's nostrils. It covered the city with ashes, puffed out over the river and valleys, and hooked onto the trees in the forest in thick tufts.

Bogarev went down. In this huge conflagration, amidst the smoke and bursting bombs, the shrieks and the children's wailing, were people who were calm and courageous. They were extinguishing fires, throwing sand on incendiary bombs, rescuing the aged from the flames. Red Army men, firemen, militiamen, workers and apprentices in smouldering clothes, their faces grim and blackened with soot, fought with all they had in them for their city, did all in their power to save and rescue what could still be saved and rescued. Bogarev immediately felt the presence of these courageous people. They appeared out of the smoke and flames, bound together by a great brotherhood, performing great deeds together, dashing out of burning houses and again plunging into a blazing inferno, saying nothing of who they were, knowing nothing of those whom they saved.

Bogarev saw an incendiary bomb fall on the roof of a two-storey house, sending up sparks that looked like fireworks and then beginning to spread in a blinding white stain. He dashed up the stairs into the stifling attic, which smelled of smoky clay and somehow

brought back a memory of his childhood, and walked over to the dimly lit skylight. The red-hot metal roofing seared his hands. Sparks landed on his clothes, but he quickly made his way to the spot where the bomb lay and with a mighty kick sent it flying over the edge of the roof. It fell into a flower bed, lighting up the showy heads of the dahlias and asters for an instant, burrowed into the friable soil and began to splutter as it died out.

From the roof Bogarev saw two men in Red Army uniform carrying a bed with an old man lying on it out of the neighbouring house, which was in flames. He recognized Ignatiev, who had asked for the guitar. The second man was Rodimtsev, shorter and broader shouldered. An old Jewish woman was talking to them rapidly, apparently thanking them for saving her husband's life. Ignatiev waved his hand—and in this sweeping, generous, free and easy gesture, it was as if he expressed the entire richness and greatheartedness of the people.

Just then the anti-aircraft guns began to boom more clamorously than ever, and to their salvoes was added the chattering of machine guns. A new wave of fascist bombers was flying over the burning city. Once again the bloodcurdling scream of falling bombs could be heard.

"Into the trenches!" someone shouted. But the people, infuriated by the struggle, no longer felt the danger.

Bogarev literally lost all sense of time, of the course and sequence of events. Together with the others he helped to put out fires, threw sand on incendiary bombs, rescued belongings from the flames, helped the stretcher-bearers carry away the injured, accompanied his men to the burning maternity hospital, carried books out of the blazing public library.

Separate scenes were indelibly imprinted on his mind. A man had come running out of a burning building shouting: "Fire! Fire!" As soon as he had seen the vast sea of flames surging around him, he had immediately calmed down; sinking to the curbstone, he remained sitting there motionless. He remembered the delicate fragrance that had suddenly spread through the reek and fumes of the overheated air—the perfumery store was on fire. Nor would he ever forget the sight of the young woman who had gone out of her mind, as she stood in the middle of the deserted square lit up by the flames, with the dead body of a little girl in her arms. Then there was the

dying horse lying on a street corner. In its fast glazing but still living eyes was a reflection of the burning city. The dark, tear-filled, agonized eyes of the horse, like a living crystal mirror, had gathered in themselves the leaping flames of the burning buildings, the smoke billowing into the air, the glowing embers of ruins and the forest of tall, slim chimneys that stood in place of the buildings that had vanished in the flames.

Suddenly Bogarev felt that he, too, had gathered in himself the whole night destruction of this peaceful, ancient city.

With the coming of dawn the conflagration began to grow dim. The sun rose on smoking ruins, on old men and women sitting patiently on bundles amidst household goods, flower vases, ancient portraits in black frames that had once hung on walls. And this sun that peered through the fast-cooling smoke of fires at the dead children was deathly pale, poisoned by the reek and the fumes.

Bogarev went to Headquarters for orders and then returned to his room. In the yard the Sergeant-Major came up to him.

"How's the car?" asked Bogarev.

"It's all right now," replied the Sergeant-Major. His eyes were bloodshot with the smoke.

"We must get going, fall your men in."

"Something's happened here, Comrade Commissar," said the Sergeant-Major. "Just before dawn the Germans dropped a bomb near the trench where the people who live in this house were taking shelter. Practically all of them were badly injured; two were killed: the old man in whose apartment you were staying, and a girl, a refugee." He snickered and added: "Ignatiev was always talking to her."

"Where are they?" asked Bogarev.

"The wounded have been taken off and the killed are still lying there—a cart's come for them."

Bogarev walked further into the yard, where a crowd of people had gathered and were looking down at the corpses. It was difficult to recognize the old man. Beside him lay a tattered, blood-bespattered bundle of books. Apparently he had raised himself and had been looking out of the shallow trench when the bomb had burst. *Annals*, Tacitus—read the title of the book lying beside the body. But the girl refugee looked as if she were alive, sleeping. Her tanned cheeks disguised her pallor, and the black lashes covered her eyes. A subtle,

shy smile was on her lips, almost as if she were embarrassed by the people crowding around her.

The cart driver, who had come up, took hold of the girl's legs and said:

"Hey there, somebody give us a hand."

"Leave her alone!" shouted Ignatiev suddenly. Lightly and tenderly he raised the body and carried it to the cart. A child who held a wilted aster in her hand placed the flower on the breast of the dead girl. Bogarev helped the cart driver to lift the body of the old man. And the crowd stood around silently, heads bowed, eyes red and inflamed.

Gazing at the dead girl, an elderly woman murmured softly:

"Lucky girl."

Bogarev turned towards his billet. The people standing around the cart remained silent; then someone's hoarse voice said sadly:

"We've given up Minsk, Bobruisk, Zhitomir, Shepetovka. How can we stop them? You see what they do. In a single night they've burned down a city like this and flown back home."

"Not exactly flown back," said a Red Army man, "our boys shot down six of them."

Bogarev soon came out of the dead lawyer's flat. He looked around for the last time at the half-wrecked room, the floor showered with glass, the books thrown from their shelves by the force of the explosion, the overturned furniture. Thoughtfully he removed the guitar from the wall, took it downstairs and put it in the back of the truck.

Rodimtsev was holding out a mess tin to Ignatiev, who stood near the truck.

"Here. Eat this, Ignatiev," he said. "There's white macaroni and meat that I got for you yesterday."

"I don't want to eat," said Ignatiev, "I want a drink—I'm all parched inside."

The city was soon left behind. The summer morning greeted them with all its solemn, tranquil splendour. They halted in the woods during the day. A slow-moving, clear stream rippled lightly over the rocks and meandered on between the trees. The coolness caressed their inflamed skins, and their eyes rested in the still shadows of the tall oaks. Bogarev noticed a clump of white mushrooms in the grass.

They were standing on thick white stalks, their tan caps lifted, and he recalled how eagerly he and his wife had gathered mushrooms in their summer home the year before.

The Red Army men bathed in the stream.

"Fifteen minutes for dinner," Bogarev told the Sergeant-Major.

He wandered slowly among the trees, rejoicing and sorrowing at the carefree beauty of the world, the rustling of the leaves.

AT REGIMENTAL HEADQUARTERS

THE OFFICERS had assembled at Headquarters. Major Mertsalov, Regimental Commander and Hero of the Soviet Union, veteran of the Finnish War, was sitting at a map with Chief of Staff Kudakov, a bald man of about forty, slow in movement and speech. Captain Babadjanyan, Commander of the 1st Battalion, was suffering from toothache on the day Bogarev arrived. During the day he had become overheated and had drunk his fill of icy spring water, with the result that, as he expressed it, "his whole jaw was breaking." Major Kochetkov, Commander of the 2nd Battalion, a good-natured, garrulous man, kept poking fun at him. Lieutenant Myshansky, Assistant Chief of Staff, handsome and broad-shouldered, was there too.

The regiment had received orders to strike a sudden blow at the German flank jointly with the heavy artillery in order to hold up the enemy's outflanking movement, thereby making it possible for the units of an infantry corps to get out of the pocket.

Mertsalov acquainted the Battalion Commanders and Commissars with the plan of operations. He was just finishing when Lieutenant Kozlov, the wide-eyed, freckled commander of a reconnaissance platoon, came into Headquarters in answer to a call.

Kozlov clicked his heels and saluted smartly. He reported loudly, clipping his every word, but all the time his round eyes smiled slyly and with quiet condescension.

Bogarev sat through the whole conference in silence. He was still under the spell of the fire, and several times shook his head as if to come to himself. At first the commanders had looked around at him a good deal, but they soon became accustomed to his presence and paid no further attention to him.

Babadjanyan, smiling as if his toothache had vanished, turned to Bogarev and said:

"I like that, Comrade Commissar! The army is retreating; just think of it, a whole army, but Babadjanyan's battalion is going into attack. Honestly, I like that!"

The representative of the neighbouring howitzer regiment, a gruff Lieutenant-Colonel who was forever jotting things down in his notebook, remarked:

"Only I must warn you, we're not going to exceed the established ration of shells."

"That goes without saying. The regulations provide for that," said Kudakov.

"That's right, comrades, a limit is a limit!" said the Lieutenant-Colonel.

"Limit indeed! The only limit I know is victory!" exclaimed Babadjanyan.

After a business-like discussion, the conversation turned to the German army. Myshansky told them about a German attack near Lvov.

"They come on in a line, a solid wall extending at least a kilometre—imagine it—and some four hundred metres back of that, another line like the first, and then a third, marching through the tall wheat, each one of 'em with a tommy gun in his hands just like that. Our field artillery mows them down, but they just keep right on. It's simply amazing. They don't shout, and they don't fire and they don't seem to be drunk; they tumble and fall in the wheat, but the rest keep coming on. Some sight, let me tell you!"

He went on to describe the movement of thousands of German tanks along the Lvov and Proskurov Highways, the landing of German parachute troops at night by the light of green and blue flares, how detachments of motorcyclists had shot up one of our Headquarters, and how the German tanks and aircraft co-ordinated their operations. He evidently derived pleasure in telling about the retreats of the first days. "And did I bunk!" he said. In the same way he seemed to relish talking about the strength of the German army.

"It's no joke, I tell you," he said, "what they did to France. It's only with their organization, their generals and their military skill that such a tremendous power could have been wiped out in thirty days."

"Yes, they have got the organization, no doubt about that," said the Chief of Staff.

"That's not it," said Myshansky. "I saw this machine in action.

It's beyond description! They've turned all the old strategy and tactics upside down."

"Wise and invincible?" Bogarev suddenly broke in loudly and angrily.

Myshansky stared at him and said in a condescending tone of voice:

"Excuse me, Comrade Commissar, but I'm a man from the front, and used to saying what I think."

"No, I shall never excuse you for that, neither you nor anyone else," Bogarev interrupted him. "Is that clear?"

"But it's just as bad to underestimate," said Kochetkov. "As my men say: the Germans are cowards, but hefty fighters."

"After all, we're not children," said Bogarev. "We know that we're dealing with the strongest army in Europe, with technical equipment—and I tell you this quite frankly—numerically superior to ours at this stage of the war.

"But I must tell you, Comrade Myshansky, that you must learn to despise fascism. You must realize that it is the lowest, vilest, most reactionary thing on earth. It's a vile compound of *ersatz* and thievery, in the worst sense of those words. Its foul ideology hasn't a spark of the creative element in it. We must despise it from the bottom of our hearts, do you understand?

"Just listen to me, please: Their sociological ideas are the stupidest, most moth-eaten ravings, laughed at in their day by Chernishevsky and Engels. The entire military doctrine of fascism has been copied letter by letter from the old plans of the German General Staff worked out by Schlieffen. All those flank attacks of theirs, spearheads and all the rest of it are just slavishly copied. The tanks and parachute troops with which the fascists have astounded you are plagiarisms: the tanks have been stolen from the British, the parachute troops from us. I am always amazed at the monstrous sterility of fascism. Not a single new military method! Everything copied. Not a single great invention. Everything stolen. Not a single new type of weapon! Everything taken over second-hand.

"German creative thought has been rendered sterile in all fields—the fascists are powerless to create, to write books, music, verse. They are stagnant as a swamp. The only element that they have introduced into history and politics is that of organized bestiality and banditry!

"We must despise and scorn their poverty of mind, Comrade

Myshansky. Have I made myself clear? The entire Red Army, from top to bottom, the whole country must be permeated with this spirit. It seems to you, a frontliner, that you are getting right at the truth without mincing matters, but in fact your psychology is that of a person who has been retreating a long time, and there is a quavering note of servility in your voice!"

Raising himself to his full height, he looked Myshansky straight in the eye and in a menacing tone said:

"As Commissar of the unit, I forbid you to utter a single word unworthy of a patriot and not in keeping with objective truth. Is that clear?"

Babadjanyan's battalion was to be the first to go into action. The attack was scheduled for 3 a.m. Kozlov, who had twice been out on reconnaissance, described in detail the disposition of the Germans on the state farm. Tanks and armoured cars were standing on the square. The men slept in the sheds where the vegetables used to be stored, a narrow barrack-like structure about forty to fifty metres long. The Germans had fixed themselves up comfortably here, making the neighbouring peasants bring several loads of hay and spread over it linen and pieces of embroidered homespun. They slept in their underwear, removing their boots, and they lit lamps without curtaining the windows. Of evenings they would sing in chorus, and the scouts lying in the surrounding gardens could hear the German songs plainly. This was particularly infuriating. "They're singing," they said, "while our men are mum, never hear them sing." And indeed at that time the men never sang as they used to—the columns were silent when they were on the march, nor did they sing or dance when they halted.

When it grew dark a unit of the howitzer regiment took up its position. The Commander and the Commissar of the unit soon went into Headquarters and sat down at a table. The Commissar opened a chessboard and the Commander took the chessmen from his haversack. Both of them made their opening moves and then sat lost in thought.

Kochetkov, Commander of the 2nd Battalion, who had strolled over to watch the game, remarked:

"I've seen some gunners in my time—and almost all of them play chess."

"And as far as I've seen," said the Commissar without removing his eyes from the board, "the infantry all play dominoes."

"That's a fact," said the Commander. He pointed to the board and remarked: "You'll lose like that, Seryozha. You'll lose your queen for sure, like that time at Mozyr."

They bent over the board and were silent. Some five minutes later, when Kochetkov had already left the hut, the Commissar said:

"Nonsense, I won't lose anything here," and without raising his eyes he went on speaking to the absent Kochetkov: "And cavalrymen like playing cards, isn't that so, Comrade Kochetkov?"

The orderly sitting at the field telephone burst out laughing, but immediately frowned in a preoccupied way and turning the handle of the apparatus said sternly:

"Moon, moon, Medinsky, checking up."

Regimental Commander Mertsalov was talking in an undertone to the Chief of Staff. Babadjanyan came into the hut, tall, thin, in a fever of excitement. His black eyes flashed in the dim light. He spoke hurriedly and vehemently, stabbing at the map with his finger:

"It's the chance of a lifetime. The scouts have reported the exact position of their tanks. If we would move the artillery to this hill, we could mop them up at point-blank range. Honestly! How can we let the opportunity slide, when we've got them right in the palm of our hand; think of it, in the palm of our hand!" And holding out his thin, dark hand he banged the table with his open palm.

Mertsalov looked at Babadjanyan.

"Very well," he said, "if we're to give it to them, we'll give it to them in style. I don't like chewing things over."

He walked over to the artillerymen.

"Comrades chess-players, I'm afraid I'll have to take you from your game. Will you please come here. . . ."

Together they bent over the map.

"It's clear that they want to cut off the highway—they're no more than forty kilometres away, after all—and come out in the rear of the army."

"That's just what our operation hinges on," said the Chief of Staff. "Bear in mind that the Commander-in-Chief is following up all these operations personally."

"Yesterday the Germans shouted over the radio: 'Surrender, Red Army men, our flame-throwing tanks have arrived and we'll set fire to the lot of you; but whoever surrenders can go home,' " said Captain Rumyantsev, Commander of the artillery unit.

"They've certainly got a nerve," said Mertsalov, "and damned insolence; they sleep undressed, while here it's already I don't know how many days since I took my boots off. And they even drive over the roads at the front with their headlights on, the bastards!"

He stood there a moment musing, and suddenly began to laugh:

"I say, that's some Commissar we've got; the way he let fly. . . ."

"Hot stuff, eh?" said the Chief of Staff. "He certainly handed it to Myshansky."

"But I liked it," said Mertsalov, chuckling, "I'll tell you straight that both Myshansky with his stories, and you with your chatter about regulations and rations, get on my nerves. I'm just a plain man, a ranker, and I'm more afraid of words than of bullets."

He looked at the Chief of Staff and said gaily:

"Good man, that Commissar. I'm going to fight together with him."

AT NIGHT

BABADJANYAN'S battalion took up its position in the woods. The men sat or lay under the trees, under windbreaks of branches whose withered leaves rustled like paper over them. The stars looked down through the leaves; the air was soft and warm.

Bogarev and Babadjanyan were walking along a scarcely perceptible path.

"Halt, who goes there?" called a sentry, and quickly added: "Advance one, the rest remain where you are."

"The rest are one," said Babadjanyan, laughing as he walked over to the sentry and whispered the countersign. They went on their way. Near one of the leaf shelters they stopped and listened to the murmured conversation of the Red Army men inside.

"Tell me, now, what do you think?" a calm, thoughtful voice was saying. "Will we leave Germany after the war, or what shall we do with her?"

"The devil knows," answered a second voice. 'We'll see when we get there."

"Now that's what I call a good conversation during a difficult retreat!" said Bogarev cheerfully.

Babadjanyan glanced at the luminous dial of his wrist watch.

Ignatiev, Rodimtsev and Sedov had not managed to rest up thoroughly after their sleepless night in the burning city. They were

wakened by the Sergeant-Major and told to go and eat. The square red eye of the field kitchen gleamed dully in the forest gloom. The Red Army men were crowded around it, making a subdued hubbub, their mess tins clinking. They already knew about the coming attack that night.

The three men carried on a lazy conversation, their spoons clattering as they ate their soup. Rodimtsev, who had already taken part in six attacks, slowly explained to his comrades:

"The first time, of course, it's kind of scary. You don't know what to make of it, and so it gives you the creeps. You're completely in the dark about where it's going to come from or what's going to come. I can tell you one thing, the rookie is terribly scared of tommy guns, even though they're not aimed at all. The machine gun doesn't aim at any particular target either. All you do is get into a ditch or behind a mound and keep your eyes skinned for a place to dash to. But mortars are the worst, nasty things; I tell you straight, even now I get the willies when I think of 'em. There's only one way of saving yourself from them—keep going. If you lie down or turn back, they'll get you."

"Damn it, I'm so sorry about that girl Vera," said Ignatiev suddenly. "I keep seeing her in front of me as if she were alive. Gosh, I just don't know."

"No, I don't give the janes a thought now," said Rodimtsev, "I've lost all feeling for them ever since this war started. Now what I'd like to see are my kids. To spend at least a day with them. But as for the dames, I'm no German stallion."

"Hell, you don't understand, I'm just sorry for her. Why did that have to happen to her—so young and so quiet. What did they kill her for?"

"Fat lot of being sorry about you," jeered Rodimtsev. "Playing the guitar in the truck the whole day long."

"That doesn't mean a thing," said the Muscovite Sedov. "That's the kind of chap Ignatiev is, it doesn't mean a thing." And he looked at the starry sky, which gleamed down between the black young leaves, continuing slowly: "Animals and plants fight to survive but the Germans are fighting for supremacy."

"You said it, Sedov," said Rodimtsev, who liked big-sounding, learned words. "You hit the nail on the head all right." After a moment's silence he went on:

"At home I used to jump when I heard the door creak. I'd be afraid to walk in the woods at night; but here I'm not afraid of anything. I wonder why? Did I get used to it, or did I just change, get tougher? I know some of the men shiver in their shoes, but as for me you can do what you like with me, I'm just not afraid, and that's all there is to it. And yet I was a quiet sort of person, family man, never even dreamed about anything like this war. I'm not the fighting kind—even when I was a kid I didn't fight, and even when I got a bit tight, had a couple too many, so to say, I wouldn't get to fighting. I'd always begin to cry; I used to get terribly sorry for people."

"That's because of everything you've been seeing," said Sedov. "You listen to what the civilians have to say; you see things like yesterday's fire, and after that you're not afraid of the devil himself."

"I don't know," replied Rodimtsev. "Still, there are people who are scared stiff. I guess it's the Battalion Commander who has trained us like that; what we have we hold. Whatever the cost—we stand fast."

"Yes, the cost is sometimes heavy, but you can depend on our commander all right," said Sedov.

"That's a fact, he's a good egg. And besides he never sends us where he doesn't have to, he's always sparing of lives. And the best thing about him is the way he sticks with you through thick and thin. I remember once when he was real sick, he stood in a bog up to his chest in water the whole day long, until he was actually spitting blood. That was before you came, when the tanks were making for Novograd-Volynsk. I went into the woods to get dry. And he lay there, so weak he couldn't even move. I went over to him and said: 'Comrade Captain,' says I, 'have a bite—I've got some bread and sausage here.' But he didn't even open his eyes, he recognized me by my voice. 'No, thanks, Comrade Rodimtsev,' says he, 'I don't want to eat. What I want,' he says, 'is a letter from my wife and children; I haven't heard from them from the very beginning.' And the way he said it. . . . Leaving him, I thought to myself: Yes, brother, you're right, you are."

Ignatiev got up, stretched, coughed.

"You're a husky devil, you are," said Rodimtsev.

"So what?" asked Ignatiev, annoyed and at the same time in a good humour.

"Nothing at all. It just goes to show. The grub's good. And as for work, you worked just as hard in the village. No reason why you shouldn't be husky."

"Yes, brother," came a jeering voice out of the darkness. "The work's not hard at the front; just wait till about a kilo and a half of splinters pepper your guts, then you'll know where it's harder, at home or here."

"Ah, that's our Kursk nightingale giving us a song," said Sedov, and turning to the man who was invisible in the darkness he asked: "Don't you like it, you devil, when the Germans shoot?"

"All right, now, all right," came the peevish reply. "As long as you like it."

Soon the battalion began to move up for the attack. The men marched in silence, and only occasionally a commander's low voice could be heard, or somebody cursed as he tripped over a tree root humping out into the narrow path. They were marching through an oak forest. The trees were silent, not even a tremor stirring the leaves. High, black, motionless, the forest looked like a solid mass cast in a single mould. Coming out of the narrow path into a wide open forest glade they suddenly discovered a blue-black starry sky overhead, so black that every falling star shooting brightly across the heavens made them start. But soon the forest closed in around them again and the sky became a bowl of golden starry-grained porridge, stirred by the huge paws of the oak trees. The sand track gleamed dully in the gloom. Leaving the forest behind them, they entered a broad plain. They marched on across fields of uncut grain and in the darkness they recognized wheat, barley, buckwheat and oats by the sound of the grains falling from the ears, the crunching of the straw underfoot, the rustling of the ears which fastened onto their tunics. And this trampling of heavy soldiers' boots over the soft body of the ungathered harvest, this grain which they felt in the darkness, pattering like sad rain, spoke of war to many a farmer's heart more eloquently and loudly than did the blazing conflagrations on the horizon, or the red tracks of the tracer bullets creeping towards the stars, or the bluish shafts of the searchlight rays sweeping across the sky, or the distant rumble of bursting bombs. This was war of a kind never known before—where the enemy rode roughshod over the whole life of the people, levelling the crosses in the churchyards where fathers and mothers were buried, burning children's books, trampling down the

gardens where grandfathers had planted apple and black cherry trees, setting their iron heels on the necks of old grannies who used to tell wonder-eyed children the tale of the cock with the golden comb, hanging village coopers, blacksmiths and grumpy old watchmen. Never before had the Ukraine, Byelorussia and Russia known such things. Never before had such things happened on Soviet soil. Marching through the night, their heavy boots treading down their native wheat and oats, the Red Army men came to a state farm where, among the little white Ukrainian cottages, stood black tanks with big-tailed dragons daubed on their sides. And quiet, kind-hearted Ivan Rodimtsev said: "No, it's simply impossible to show them any mercy!"

Even before the first shell burst near the shed where the German infantry and tankmen were billeted, a Red Army man whose name nobody remembered made his way through the wire entanglements, slipped unnoticed between two cottages into a garden, climbed over the fence into the square and crept up to some hayricks that had been stacked there by the Germans the day before. A sentry spotted him and shouted. The Red Army man silently continued crawling on his way. The sentry was so astonished at the audacity of the man that he just stood there gaping before collecting his wits sufficiently to turn his tommy gun on him. But the Red Army man was already within a few yards of the hayricks and just managed to hurl a bottle of inflammable liquid into the nearest rick before the bullets got him. The reddish-yellow flames of the burning hay lit up the German tanks, armoured cars and whippets standing in the village square. And immediately, at a range of six hundred metres, the guns opened fire. The gunners could see the Germans dashing out of the shed.

"The infantry are late," said Rumyantsev angrily to Commissar Nevtulov.

But soon a red rocket gave the signal to attack. The guns ceased fire instantly. There was a moment of silence while the men lying in wait sprang to their feet. Across the dark grove, over the fields of ungathered wheat came a long-drawn-out, low, rolling "Hurrah!" Babadjanyan's companies were advancing to the attack. Heavy machine guns began to rattle; rifle shots cracked.

Babadjanyan took the telephone from the signaller. The sound of No. 1 Company Commander's voice came to him direct from the battlefields:

"We've reached the edge of the village. The enemy is on the run."

Babadjanyan went over to Bogarev and the Commissar could see tears in the Battalion Commander's fiery black eyes.

"The enemy is running, the enemy is running, Comrade Commissar," he said breathing hard. "Damn it, we could have cut them off, the swine!" His voice rose to a shout. "Mertsalov hasn't got Kochetkov's battalion in the right place! Why'd he hold them so far back? They should have gone in on the flank!"

From the observation post they could see the Germans running from the outskirts of the village towards the square. Many of them were only half-dressed and carried their arms and bundles of clothing in their hands. The long barrack shed was all in flames, the tanks on the square were blazing, and a high red tower of smoke and flame rose quiveringly over the oil tankers. Officers could be seen among the soldiers, shouting, brandishing their revolvers threateningly, and running themselves.

"Machine guns, machine guns forward!" shouted Mertsalov, running over to the waiting reserve company. Together with the machine-gunners he ran into the village.

The Germans retreated along the dirt road, in the direction of the village of Marchikhina Buda, which was some nine kilometres from the state farm. A large number of tanks and armoured cars had gone, and the Germans had managed to carry off their dead and wounded.

Dawn was already breaking. Bogarev examined the smoke-blackened German vehicles, reeking of burned paint and oil, and touched the still warm, dead metal carcasses.

The Red Army men were laughing and grinning. The commanders laughed and joked, and even the wounded were talking excitedly with their bloodless lips about the night's fighting.

Bogarev realized that this sudden, hurriedly prepared raid on the state farm was but a minor episode in our long retreat. With his very soul he could feel the vastness of the territory from which we had withdrawn, the calamity of losing big cities, industrial regions, the tragedy of the millions of people who were now at the mercy of the fascists. He knew that in the past few months we had lost thousands of villages and in the course of this night had regained only one of them. But he was happy; for with his own eyes he had seen the Germans fleeing in all directions, had seen their screaming, frightened officers. He had heard the loud happy talk of the Red Army men, had seen the tears of joy in the eyes of the Commander from distant

Armenia when his men had driven the Germans out of a little village on the border of the Ukraine and Byelorussia. This was the tiny seed of the great tree of victory.

He was probably the only man in the regiment who knew the real situation in which the troops who had been in last night's raid now found themselves. The Divisional Commissar's parting words had been: "You must hold out, hold out to the last!"

He had seen the map at Front H.Q. and had a very clear idea of the regiment's task: to hold the dirt road at the point where it passed the state farm and, as long as their forces lasted, to keep the German units from breaking through to the highway in the rear of the retreating army. He knew that the fate in store for the regiment was no easy one.

At 7 a.m. German bombers came over. They appeared suddenly from behind the forest.

"Aircraft!" shouted the sentries.

Dive bombers, breaking formation, strung out in single file and then formed a circle so that the leader closed in on the tail of the last plane, and in this formation they proceeded slowly and attentively to take stock of what was going on below, the whole "merry-go-round" circling directly over the state farm. This deliberate and nerve-racking roundabout lasted about a minute and a half. The people on the ground were jumping about like children playing at hide-and-seek, running from one shelter to another.

"Lie down, don't run!" shouted the commanders.

Suddenly the leading bomber dived, followed by the second and then the third; bombs screamed and burst with a shattering roar. Black smoke, dust and clods of torn earth filled the air. The men tried to press their bodies closer to the ground, taking advantage of every hollow. It was as if the howl of the bombs, the crash of the explosions and the roar of the engines as the aircraft came out of their dives held them pinned fast to mother earth.

One of the men raised himself and began to fire at the diving aircraft with his tommy gun. It was Ignatiev.

"What are you doing? What the hell are you giving our position away for! Cease fire at once!" shouted Myshansky from where he was sitting in a trench.

But Ignatiev didn't hear him and went on firing.

"I order you to cease fire!" shouted Myshansky.

Somewhere quite close by a second tommy gun began to crackle.

"Another one?... What the hell...." began Myshansky looking out and then suddenly breaking off. It was Commissar Bogarev who was firing....

"The Germans got nothing out of their bombings," said the Regimental Chief of Staff when it was over. "Just imagine it: they slogged away for thirty-five minutes, unloaded at least fifty bombs just to wound two men, both mere scratches, and bust a machine gun."

Bogarev sighed. "No," he thought, "their results were by no means so trifling—the men are talking in low tones again, and they've got that dreary, scared look in their eyes again; their spirits have been damped."

Just then Kozlov came up. His face seemed to have grown thinner and was covered with that dark film so often seen on the skins of men who have just come out of the thick of a battle. Whether it is the soot of fires, the smoke of explosions, the fine dust which the blast following an explosion raises and mixes with the sweat of battle, God alone knows. But the fact remains that after battle faces always look thinner, darker and sterner, while the eyes become deeper and calmer.

"Comrade Regimental Commander," Kozlov began his report, "Zaitsev has returned from reconnaissance. German tanks have arrived in Marchikhina Buda; he counted up to a hundred of them. Most of them are mediums, but there are some heavies as well."

Mertsalov glanced at the commanders' frowning faces and said quietly:

"You see what a position we're in for the Germans, comrades, like a bone stuck in their throat as it were."

And he went off towards the square.

The Red Army men were digging trenches along the road and constructing pits for the anti-tank squads.

Handsome, cheeky Zhavelev asked Rodimtsev softly:

"You were the first to get into the German store, Rodimtsev. They say there were watches there by the gross! Is that a fact?"

"I should say there were! Enough for my children and my children's children, and then some!" said Rodimtsev.

"Did you grab anything for a souvenir?" asked Zhavelev giving him the wink.

"Good heavens, what an idea...." stammered Rodimtsev. "I just couldn't do anything like that; it makes me sick just to touch their

things. And anyway, why should I take anything—I'm fighting to the death."

He glanced round and went on:

"Just look at that Ignatiev! For every shovelful we dig out he digs three. The two of us have dug one trench while he's gone and dug two all by himself."

"And what's more he's singing, the son-of-a-bitch," said Sedov, "and it's two days since he slept."

Rodimtsev raised his shovel and listened.

"By God, he is singing," he said in delighted amazement. "What do you think of that!"

MARCHIKHINA BUDA

MARIA TIMOFEYEVNA Cherednichenko, mother of the Divisional Commissar, a dark-complexioned seventy-year-old woman, was getting ready to leave her native village. Her neighbours had asked her to leave with them in the daytime, but Maria Timofeyevna was baking bread for the road and it would be ready only by night. The chairman of the collective farm was leaving the next morning, and she had decided to go with him. Lenya, her eleven-year-old grandson, had come to visit her from Kiev during his school vacation some three weeks before the outbreak of the war. She had heard nothing from her son since the beginning of the war and had made up her mind to take her grandchild to Voroshilovgrad, to the relatives of his mother, who had died three years previously.

The Divisional Commissar had asked his mother to come and live with him—in his roomy Kiev apartment. She would be much more comfortable and life would be easier for her. She used to visit him regularly every year, but rarely stayed more than a month. Her son would take her for drives through the city; she had visited the Historical Museum twice, and went to the theatre regularly. The theatre-goers would look with interest and respect at the tall, elderly peasant woman with the wrinkled, toil-worn hands sitting in the first row of the orchestra. Her son usually came in just before the last act, as he finished work very late. They would walk through the foyer side by side and everyone would make way for them—the upright, stern old lady with the black shawl over her shoulders, and the military man with the high rank of Divisional Commissar whose stern face was

just as dark-complexioned, and who looked so like her. "Mother and son," the women would whisper to one another.

In 1940 Maria Timofeyevna had been ill and had not been able to visit her son. But in July he had dropped in to see her for a couple of days on his way to manœuvres. During this visit he had again asked her to come to Kiev. After the death of his wife he had lived a solitary existence, and he was afraid that Lenya missed a woman's care and tenderness. Besides it distressed him to know that his seventy-year-old mother still continued to work on the collective farm, carrying pails of water from a distant well and chopping her own firewood.

She listened to him in silence while he was arguing with her as they were drinking tea in the garden under the apple tree which his father had planted, and around sunset they went together to visit his father's grave. In the cemetery she had said:

"Do you think I can leave this place? Here I shall die. You must forgive me, son."

And now Maria Timofeyevna was getting ready to leave her native village. On the evening before her departure she had gone to visit an old lady of her acquaintance. She had taken Lenya with her. When they came to the house they saw that the gate was wide open, while in the yard stood one-eyed Vassili Karpovich, the old collective-farm cowherd, the little brown dog belonging to the mistress of the house grovelling beside him, its tail between its legs.

"They be gone already," said Vassili. "They thought you'd be going in the morning."

"No, we're leaving tomorrow," said Lenya. "The chairman has given us a horse and cart."

The setting sun lit up the ripening tomatoes planted by the loving hands of the old lady in a window box, the flowers which ran riot in front of the house, the fruit trees with their whitewashed trunks and props under the branches. On the fence paling lay a neatly-planed latch which closed the gate. In the kitchen garden pumpkins gleamed golden among the green leaves, the white kernels of corn were swelling in their green sheathes, bean pods and pea pods hung heavily, the round black eyes of sunflowers stared.

Maria Timofeyevna went into the abandoned house. Here, too, everything bore traces of a tranquil life, of the love of the mistress of the house for cleanliness and for flowers—in the window boxes were

roses in full bloom; in one corner of the room stood a dark-leaved rubber plant, on the sideboard were a young lemon seedling and two pots with the slim shoots of date palms. And everything, everything in the house—the kitchen table with the round black marks of hot iron pots, the green washstand with the white daisies painted on it, the cupboard with the cups from which no one ever drank, the dark pictures on the wall—everything spoke of a long life that had been lived in this now tenantless house, of the granddad and granny, of the children who had pored over their textbooks at the table, of quiet winter and summer evenings. And thousands of such white Ukrainian cottages stood deserted, while the people who built them, who had planted trees around them, passed mournfully on their way along the dusty road leading east.

"Granddad, did they leave the dog?" asked Lenya.

"They didn't want to take him. I'll look after him," said the old man, and burst into tears.

"What's the use of crying?" asked Maria Timofeyevna.

"What, indeed!" said the old man and waved his hand.

And with this heavy movement of his hand with its work-stained and mutilated nails he expressed how all life had come crashing about their ears.

Maria Timofeyevna hurried home and the pale thin Lenya scarcely managed to keep up with her.

How bitter it was now to walk down this village street! It was along this very street that she had once driven to church to be married. It was along this street, too, that she had walked behind the coffins of her father, her mother and her husband. And tomorrow she would have to take her place in the cart among the bundles of hastily gathered effects and leave the house where she had lived as mistress for fifty years, where she had raised her children, where her quiet, intelligent and delicate grandson had come on a visit to her.

And in the village, lit up by the warm rays of the evening sun, in the white cottages, among the flower gardens and in the pleasant orchards, everyone spoke in whispers about the fact that all the way to the river there were no Red Army men, and that old man Kotenko, who had left the village for the Donbas during the collectivization campaign but had later returned, had told his old woman to whitewash their cottage as they did before Easter. And the old widow woman Gulyenskaya stood at the well and said to everyone:

"They say those 'uns will be dividing the land up again and that they have faith in the Lord. . . ."

And sinister, evil rumours sped through the village. The old men, coming out onto the street, gazed in the direction from which every evening the herd used to return from pasture in a cloud of rosy dust—from somewhere beyond the distant woods, from the oak woods which teemed with mushrooms, the Germans were supposed to come. The old women, weeping and moaning, dug pits in the gardens and under their houses, burying all their possessions there—quilts, felt boots, pots and pans, linen cloth—all the time glancing up towards the west. But the west was clear and quiet.

Grishchenko, the chairman of the collective farm, went over to old man Kotenko's to get the four sacks which he had lent him about a month ago.

Kotenko, a tall broad-shouldered old man of sixty-five with a thick beard, was sitting at the table and watching the old woman whitewash the cottage.

"Good evening," said Grishchenko. "I've come for my sacks."

In a jeering tone Kotenko asked:

"You getting ready to travel, chairman?"

"Of course I am, it's time to be going," said Grishchenko looking daggers at the old man, who seemed to have grown taller and straighter these last few days. His speech had become derisive, deliberate, and he addressed Grishchenko familiarly.

"Yes, yes, it is time to be going," the old man said to him. "What else can you do when the chairman of the Village Soviet has gone. when everyone has left the office, the bookkeeper gone, almost all your people gone, even the postman and all the farm foremen."

He burst out laughing.

"You see how it is. As for the sacks I can't give them to you. You see, my son-in-law took them to carry grain to Byeli Kolodyets, and he won't be coming back till the day after tomorrow."

Grishchenko nodded his head and said calmly:

"Never mind, let them go. And why are you whitewashing your house all of a sudden?"

"Whitewashing the house?" echoed the old man.

He wanted to tell the chairman why he was doing it. But cautious, reticent, accustomed to keeping his own council, he was afraid even now. "The devil only knows, he may up and shoot me yet," he thought.

He was intoxicated with joy, and even though the collective-farm chairman was still going about from house to house, he wanted to give immediate expression to all that was in his soul, to all the thoughts that had filled his mind in the long winter nights, thoughts which he had never uttered out loud even to his old woman.

Once, about forty years ago, he had gone to visit an uncle of his who had worked as a farm hand for a rich Esthonian kulak. The memory of it was like a poem singing in his very heart. He had never forgotten the beautiful cattle shed with the cement floors that were actually scrubbed with soap, the steam mill, the master of the house himself, a thick-set, bearded old man in a handsome cloak trimmed with fur. A thousand times he recalled the beautiful brightly painted sleigh drawn by a young and spirited horse which had drawn up to the porch with the rich Esthonian in his wonderful cloak, his high, expensive fur hat, his embroidered mittens and soft, warm felt boots. He remembered how when they were driving through the woods where the farm hands were sawing wood, the master had taken a bottle out of his pocket, unscrewed the top and taken a drink of vodka infused with some brownish-red berries. This was no merchant, no landed nobleman; no, he was a muzhik, but a rich, powerful muzhik.

From that moment Kotenko had begun to dream of becoming a rich muzhik like that, with beautiful russet cows, flocks of sheep, hundreds of enormous pinkish hogs, a muzhik on whose farm dozens of strong, subservient farm labourers would work. He forged ahead towards the realization of his dream ruthlessly, tirelessly. In 1915 he had sixty dessiatines of land and had built a steam flour mill. The Revolution had shattered his dream, deprived him of his aim in life. Two of his sons had gone off with the Red Army and had perished at the front during the Civil War. Kotenko had forbidden his wife to hang their photographs on the wall. He waited, biding his time and hoping. In 1931 he had gone to the Donetz Basin, where he had worked in a mine for eight years. But his dream of the life of a kulak would not and could not die.

And now it seemed to him that the time had come when this dream would at last come true.

For years he had been tortured by envy of the old woman Cherednichenko. Kotenko saw that the honours which he had wanted to acquire under tsarist rule had been acquired by her in a life of labour

after the Revolution. She was taken to town in a car and made speeches in the theatre. Kotenko was unable to look at her picture in the district newspaper calmly—the old woman with the thin lips, a black shawl around her shoulders, looked back at him with wise, stern eyes, and it seemed to him that she was laughing at him. "Ekh, Kotenko, you haven't lived right," said her face. A feeling of hatred seized him whenever he saw this old woman calmly going to work in the fields, whenever he heard the neighbours say:

"Timofeyevna has gone to Kiev to visit her son—a lieutenant came for her in a blue car."

But now Kotenko knew that he had not waited in vain, that it was he who had proved right and not she. It was not for nothing that he had grown a beard like the one the Esthonian kulak had worn, not for nothing that he had waited and hoped.

And gazing at the chairman, who was watching him narrowly, he mastered his feelings and consoled himself: "Patience, patience—you have waited long; it's only a day or so now to wait, only a day."

"I don't know," he said yawning, "I don't know, the old woman would go and take it into her head to whitewash the house just now. And once a woman takes something into her head, there's simply no doing anything about it."

He accompanied the chairman to the gate and for a long time looked down the deserted road, while gleeful and exciting thoughts stirred in his head:

"Cherevichenko built his house on my land, which means that the house will be mine, and if he wants to stay he'll have to pay me rent in gold.... The collective-farm stables were built on my land, which means that they'll be my stables.... The collective-farm orchard was planted on my land, which means that the cherry and apple trees will be mine.... And the collective-farm bees will be mine, too—I'll prove that they took away those hives from me after the Revolution...."

The road lay calm and deserted, the dust not stirring, not a rustle from the trees bordering it. The full, red, calm sun sank into the ground.

"So it's come at last," thought Kotenko.

"WILL WE MANAGE to leave in time, Granny?" Lenya asked.

"We'll manage, Lenichka," replied Maria Timofeyevna.

"But, Granny, why are we retreating all the time? Are the Germans really stronger?"

"Go to sleep, Lenichka," said Maria Timofeyevna. "We have to leave tomorrow as soon as it begins to get light. I'll lie down for an hour or so and rest, and then I'll get our things together. It's hard for me to breathe. I feel like a stone was lying on my chest, and I haven't the strength to push it off."

"They haven't killed Daddy, have they, Granny?"

"What are you talking about, Lenya! They won't be killing your Daddy. He's strong."

"Stronger than Hitler?"

"Of course he's stronger, Lenichka. He was a muzhik, like your Granddad, and now he's a general. He's smart as smart can be, he is."

"But he never says anything, Granny. He takes me on his knees and doesn't say a word. And once we used to sing songs together."

"Go to sleep, Lenya, go to sleep."

"Will we take the cow with us?"

Never had Maria Timofeyevna felt so weak as she did on that day. There was so much to do and her strength had suddenly deserted her completely. She felt spent and exhausted.

She spread out her cotton quilt on the bench, placed a pillow at the head and lay down. The stove made the room hot. Warmth emanated from the hot, golden loaves of bread that she had just taken from the oven, smelling so pleasant, so fragrant.

Could this really be the last time that she would take hot new bread from her oven? Could it really be that she would never again eat bread made from her own wheat? Her thoughts became confused.

In her childhood she had lain so, on the sleeping shelf over the warm oven, on her father's shaggy sheepskin, watching her mother take the bread out of the oven. "Manka! Come and eat," her grandfather would call. Where was her son now? Was he alive? How could she get to him? "Manka, oh, Manka," her sister would call, and with her bare, thin feet she would scamper across the cold clay floor. She must take all the photographs, take all the pictures down from the walls. The flowers would remain. The fruit trees would remain. And

all the graves would remain. She had not gone to the cemetery to take her last farewell. And the cat would remain. The collective farmers told how in the burned villages only the cats remained behind. The dogs went off with their masters; but the cats, accustomed to the houses, didn't want to leave. How dreadfully hot it was, how difficult to breathe, how heavy her hands were.

It was as if only now her hands felt the tremendous labour which she had accomplished in the course of her seventy years of life. Tears were coursing down her cheeks, but her hands were too heavy to raise, and the tears flowed and flowed. She had cried like that when a fox had stolen the fattest goose from the flock. She had come home in the evening and her mother had asked her:

"Manka, where's our goose?"

She had cried and the tears had run down her cheeks. And her father, who was always so stern and so silent, came up to her, patted her on the head and said: "Don't cry, daughter, don't cry." And it seemed to her that now too she was crying with joy at the tender touch of her father's roughened hand on her hair.

In this bitter, last evening of her life, time disappeared, and in the house which she must now leave, her childhood and girlhood, and the first days of her married life came back to her again. She heard the wailing of her nursing children, and the merry, sly whispering of her friends. She saw her strong, young, black-haired husband as he sat at the table with the guests he had invited, and she heard the tinkle of forks, the crunching of pickled cucumbers, firm as apples. Her grandmother had taught her how to preserve pickles. Everyone began to sing and she raised her young voice together with theirs, felt the eyes of the men on her and saw the proud look of her husband as he watched her, while old man Afanasi shook his head affectionately and said: "Oh, that Maria. . . ."

She must have fallen asleep. She was awakened by a strange noise, savage, a noise such as she had never before heard in her native village. Lenya was awake and calling to her:

"Granny, Granny, get up, quick. Granny, dear, please, you mustn't sleep now."

Quickly she walked over to the window, pulled the curtain aside and looked out.

Was it still night, or had some horrible new day dawned? Everything had turned red, as if the whole village—the low cottages, the

trunks of the birches, the orchards, the fences—had been drenched in bloody water. She heard shots, the roaring of automobile engines, shouts. The Germans were in the village. The horde had come....

The horde had come from the west, with the latest model in radio transmitters, shiny nickel gadgets, glass, wolfram, molybdenum cars with synthetic rubber tires. And as if they were ashamed of the splendid cars that had been manufactured in spite of themselves by European science and labour, the fascists had daubed on them their savage symbols—bears, wolves, foxes, dragons, skulls and crossbones.

Maria Timofeyevna realized that death had come for her.

"Lenya," she said, "run over to Vassili Karpovich. He'll take you away, he'll go with you to your Dad's."

She helped her grandson dress.

"Where's my cap?" asked Lenya.

"It's warm now, you can go without your cap," she said.

And he, just as if he were grown-up, understood at once why he ought not to put on his sailor cap with the gold lettering.

"Can I take the gun and the fishing hooks with me?" he asked softly.

"Take them, take them," and she handed him his black toy revolver.

Putting her arms around the lad, Maria Timofeyevna kissed him on the mouth.

"Go, Lenichka," she said, "and tell your father that I send him my love; and you, grandson, remember your old Granny, don't forget her."

He ran out of the house just as the Germans were coming towards their yard.

"Run through the vegetable gardens, through the vegetable gardens!" his grandmother called after him.

He ran, and her parting words seemed to have sunk forever in his confused child's soul. He did not know that these words would again arise in his memory, and that he would never forget them so long as he lived.

Maria Timofeyevna met the Germans at the threshold. Behind them was old man Kotenko. And even in this terrible moment Maria Timofeyevna was amazed at the old man's eyes, which were riveted on her face so greedily, so hungrily, seeking a trace of bewilderment, of fear.

A tall thin German with a grimy, sweat-streaked face asked her in Russian, pronouncing the words as painstakingly as a child reading off big block letters:

"Are you the mother of the Commissar?"

Sensing death, she held her already straight back still more stiffly and said softly but distinctly:

"I am his mother."

The German looked her in the face slowly, intently, then let his eyes travel to the portrait of Lenin on the wall, the oven, and the unmade bed.

The soldiers standing behind his back were looking around the room curiously, and the old woman, her vision suddenly grown extraordinarily clear, caught their swift enterprising glances at the milk jug on the table, the linen towels with the hand-embroidered roosters, the whole-wheat bread, the fat back wrapped in a clean bit of homespun, and the bottle of cherry brandy with the ruby glint on the windowsill.

One of the soldiers made some remark in a low good-natured voice, and the others burst out laughing. And once again Maria Timofeyevna, her senses keen to the point of clairvoyance, understood what the soldiers were talking about. It was a simple soldiers' joke about the good things to eat that had come their way. The old lady shuddered with a sudden realization of the terrible indifference with which the Germans regarded her. The great calamity that had befallen the seventy-year-old woman who was prepared to meet her death did not interest, move or disturb them. She was just an object standing in front of the bread, pork, embroidered towels and linen, while they wanted to eat and drink. She roused in them no hate, for she was not a menace to them. They regarded her as people regard a cat or a calf. There she stood, a needless old woman who for some reason or other had been existing in the *Lebensraum* that the Germans needed. There was nothing on earth more terrible than this indifference to human beings.

As the Germans advanced, they noted their lines of march on maps, entered in their diaries the amount of honey they ate, described the weather, bathing in the rivers, moonlit nights, and conversations with friends. Only very few of them wrote about the massacres in the innumerable villages with the difficult and quickly forgotten names. To them this was just a boring but legitimate bit of routine.

"Where is the son of the Commissar?" asked the German.

"Are you fighting children, too, you swine?" asked Maria Timofeyevna.

She remained where she fell on the threshold, and the German tankmen took care to step across the pool of black blood as they walked back and forth, carrying out things and chattering animatedly.

"The bread is still warm."

"If you were a real sport you'd let me have at least one of those five towels you've got. What about it? Eh? I haven't got a single one like that with roosters."

A table stood in the middle of the room. It was covered with a white cloth. On it were honey, cream, home-made Ukrainian sausage larded with fat and garlic, and big dark earthenware jugs filled with milk. A samovar was boiling on the table.

Sergei Ivanovich Kotenko, wearing a black jacket that glistened with naphthaline flakes, a black waistcoat and an embroidered shirt of fine white linen, was playing host to his German guests, a major, commander of a tank unit, and a swarthy, elderly officer in gold-rimmed spectacles, with a white skull on his uniform sleeve. The officers were tired after their long night route march and their faces were pale.

The major drank a glass of the dark brown baked milk and said with a yawn:

"I like this milk a lot. It's something like chocolate."

Sergei Ivanovich pushed the plates over to his guests.

"Please help yourselves," he said. "Why aren't you eating anything?"

But the tired officers did not want to eat. They yawned as they toyed with the little rounds of sausage on their plates.

"We ought to put this old duffer out, and his wife too," said the spectacled officer. "I'm just about suffocating with the smell of naphthaline. It's enough to make you put on a gas mask."

The major chuckled.

"Try the honey," he said. "My wife keeps writing me to eat as much of this Ukrainian honey as I can manage to put down."

"Have they found the boy yet?" asked the officer in the spectacles.

"No, not yet."

The major took a little piece of bread, buttered it, dug into the sugared honey with a spoon and piled it on, then popped it into his mouth and washed it down with milk.

"Not bad," he said, "not at all bad, let me tell you."

Kotenko very much wanted to ask whom it was necessary to inform about his rights to the house, the collective-farm stables, apiary and orchard. But he was held back by an unwonted feeling of timidity, which he himself did not understand. Hitherto he had imagined that with the coming of the Germans he would immediately feel at ease and free, that he would sit with them at the table chatting and telling them things. But they had not invited him to sit down, and in their jeering, yawning faces he saw only indifference and boredom. When he addressed them, they frowned impatiently, and his keyed-up ears caught incomprehensible German words that sounded as if they were spoken in derision and contempt of him and his wife.

The officers got up, and mumbling some indistinct words which were probably a careless goodbye, went out. They walked off in the direction of the schoolhouse, to which the orderly brought them their bedding.

Day was already breaking. The smouldering fires were smoking.

"Well, Motrya, let's go to bed," said Kotenko.

"I can't sleep," said his wife.

The feeling of alarm and fear began to grow in Kotenko. He looked at the table and the untouched food. How he had dreamed of a gay and triumphant advent, of a heartfelt word that would mark the beginning of a new and prosperous life.

He lay down but could not fall asleep. Thoughts of his sons, who had died while serving in the Red Army, and of old lady Cherednichenko kept assailing him. He had not been a witness to her last minutes, when she had lashed out at the officer. He had run out of the the house and stood near the fence. He had heard the shot coming from the house and his teeth had begun to chatter nervously. But the officer who came out was so serene, and the soldiers who were dragging things out of the house were so good-natured and matter-of-fact that Kotenko had calmed down.

"The old lady went absolutely daft," he thought. "The idea of taking it into her head to slap an officer!"

He groaned and rolled over on his side. The smell of naphthaline bothered him. It made his head heavy and his temples throb. He got up quietly, went to the trunk where the winter clothes were kept and took out the photographs of his sons which his wife had hidden there. The boys were in cavalry uniform and had sabres at their sides. With

a glance at the round-eyed lads that gazed up at him so intently and curiously from the pictures, he began to tear up the photographs and then threw the pieces under the stove. After that he lay down again. For some reason he immediately felt melancholy and calm. "Now everything'll be the way I want," he thought as he fell asleep.

It was nearly nine when he woke up and went out into the street. Dust stood high over the village. Big trucks carrying infantry kept driving down the village street in a never-ending stream. Mobs of soldiers were roaming through the houses. Their gaunt, sunburned faces stared about suspiciously and hostilely.

"There's might for you," thought Kotenko.

He heard a wild shriek coming from the direction of the well and looked round. Hannah Cherevichenko was hurrying home with pails of water, and a tall German in thick-soled boots was rushing after her with giant strides.

"Oh, oh, our house is on fire. They set fire to it, damn them, and they won't let us put it out!" she was wailing.

The lanky soldier caught up with her, made her put down the pails, said something hurriedly, took her hand and looked into her tear-swollen eyes. Two more soldiers came up and laughingly began to tell her something, spreading their arms wide to keep her from passing. Meanwhile the bright yellow flames, gay, living, carefree as the early morning summer sun, flared higher and higher in the thatched roof.

Dust lay thick in the street and settled on faces. The air was laden with the fumes of conflagrations. Wisps of white smoke rose from charred ruins, and tall slim chimneys rose like sorrowful monuments on the sites of the wrecked houses. Iron pots and pans had remained in some of the ovens, and women and children, their eyes reddened with smoke, were digging in the ashes and dragging out blackened pots and frying pans.

Kotenko saw two Germans getting ready to milk a cow. One of them was holding out a plate of thinly sliced salted potatoes to the cow, which was mistrustfully nibbling the dainties with a moist lip and looking askance at the second German, who had placed an enamel pail under her udder.

Excited German voices and the alarmed cackling of geese could be heard from the pond. Some of the soldiers, hopping about like frogs with outspread arms, were catching the geese which were being chased from the pond by two absolutely identical red-headed Germans, who

were standing up to their waists in the water, stark naked. The red-headed soldiers came out of the pond and walked over to the little old school-teacher, Anna Petrovna, who was hurrying across the square. They made faces at her and began to dance around her, while the soldiers howled with laughter as they looked on.

Kotenko walked over to the school. There, from the crossbar where the swing on which the children used to play during recess had hung, Grishchenko, the chairman of the collective farm, was hanging. His bare feet looked as if they were just about to step down to the ground —living feet with corns and crooked toes. His purpled face looked straight at Kotenko, and Kotenko could not repress a cry of fear. Grishchenko was laughing at him. He was looking at him with a terrible, wild glare, his tongue out, his heavy head lolling, and he was asking:

"Well, Kotenko, you lived to see the Germans, eh?"

Everything grew hazy in Kotenko's head. He wanted to cry out, but could not do so. With a wave of his hand he turned on his heel and went off.

"There it is, my stable," he said out loud, staring at the black traces of the fire—the jutting beams, rafters and posts. He walked on to the apiary, and from the distance caught sight of the wrecked, overturned hives, heard the angry buzzing of the bees that seemed to be guarding the body of the young beekeeper lying under the ash tree.

"There it is, my apiary," he said, "my beehives." And he stood there gazing at the dark cluster of bees hovering over the dead body of the beekeeper.

Then he walked on to look at the collective-farm orchard. Not a single apple, not a single pear was on the branches. Soldiers were chopping down the fruit trees, hacking away at them with axes and cursing the tough, fibrous trunks.

"The hardest wood to cut is pear and cherry," thought Kotenko. "They've got a twisted grain."

Field kitchens were smoking in the collective-farm orchard. Cooks were plucking geese, scraping the bristles from slaughtered young pigs, peeling potatoes, carrots and beets that had been brought from the collective-farm vegetable garden.

Hundreds of soldiers were lying or sitting under the trees and chewing, chewing, chewing, smacking their lips loudly as they gulped down the juice of white Antonovsky apples and sweet mellow pears. Kotenko felt as if this smacking drowned out all the other sounds: the

honking of the trucks that kept arriving without a stop, the humming of motors, the cries and shouts, the mooing of cows and the gobbling of the geese. And it seemed to him that even if thunder were to burst forth from the heavens, it, too, would be drowned out by this mighty, impatient smacking of hundreds of cheerfully munching German soldiers.

And the thoughts in Kotenko's head grew more and more jumbled. He wandered through the village without knowing where he was going or why. The women he passed drew aside hastily, while the men regarded him with unseeing hate-filled eyes. The older folks, who no longer feared death, shook their withered, brown fists at him, and cursed him fiercely. He walked through the village and looked about him. His black jacket was covered with a layer of dust; his sweating face became streaked and filthy; his head ached painfully. And it seemed to him that his temples were bursting because of the heavy strong smell of naphthaline that he could not get rid of; that the ringing in his ears was a result of the chorus of cheerful smacking.

Meanwhile ever new black trucks kept driving through the yellow and grey dust, and ever new lanky Germans jumped to the ground over the high black sides, without waiting for the tailboard to be lowered, and scattered among the little white houses, crawled into the gardens, orchards, barns and chicken coops.

Kotenko went home and stopped short at the threshold. The festive table that he had set out the evening before was filthy and covered with upset empty bottles. Drunken Germans were staggering about the rooms. One of them was fishing around in the oven; another, standing on a stool, was taking down the new embroidered towels that had been hung around the ikon the evening before. Catching sight of Kotenko he winked and quickly babbled some long German sentence. A loud, quick, cheerful smacking came from the kitchen. The Germans were eating fat back, apples, home-made bread.

Kotenko went out into the corridor. There, in a dark corner near the water barrel, stood his wife. His heart was convulsed with a horrible pain. There she stood, the silent, humble, obedient wife of his, who had never in her life crossed him, never in her life said a loud or harsh word to him.

"Motrya, my poor dear Motrya," he whispered softly, and suddenly stopped short. Bright, young eyes glared at him.

"I wanted to take away my sons' pictures," she said, and he did

not recognize her voice, "but you tore them up in the night and threw the scraps under the stove."

With that she turned and went out of her dishonoured home.

Kotenko remained there in the dim corridor. Before his eyes flickered a picture of the Esthonian kulak in his handsome, fur-trimmed jacket smacking his lips juicily, gaily, loudly.... And suddenly he saw in a clear bright patch of moonlight Maria Cherednichenko, her grey hair streaming about her, lit up by the flames of a fire. Once again envy of her seared his heart. But now it was no longer her life that he envied, it was her clean death.

For an instant he caught a glimpse of the terrible abyss into which his soul had plunged. He began to grope around for the pail with the rope tied to its handle. It clattered familiarly as it fell over, but there was no rope on it. The Germans had taken it away.

"No, they won't stop me," he muttered as he took the strong, narrow belt from his trousers; and right then and there, in the dim corridor, he set about tying a noose and fastening it to the hook over the water barrel.

WHO IS RIGHT?

THAT NIGHT at H.Q. Mertsalov and Bogarev sat down to supper together. Raising a piece of meat covered with white bits of cooled-off fat on his fork Mertsalov said:

"Some people warm it up, but personally I prefer it cold."

Bread and cheese followed the canned meat and then they settled down to tea. With the back of the bayonet which did duty as a can-opener Mertsalov chipped pieces off a huge sugar loaf.

"Oh, I say, I clean forgot!" exclaimed Mertsalov. "Why, we've got some raspberry jam. What's your reaction to that, Comrade Commissar?"

"Distinctly favourable, I must say; it happens to be my favourite jam."

"Splendid! Now I myself prefer cherry. That's a jam for you!"

Mertsalov picked up a big iron tea kettle.

"Careful, careful, it's all covered with soot. Must have been boiled over an open fire."

"It was boiled in the field kitchen, but Proskurov heated it up over a camp fire," said Mertsalov smiling.

"Yes, anyone can see that you're about seventy times more experienced in camp life than I am, Comrade Mertsalov. Where'll I put the jam? Right in the cup, I think, that'll be simplest."

Simultaneously they took a noisy sip at their tea, and simultaneously they raised their heads, looked one another in the eyes and laughed.

The last few days had drawn them much closer. In general, life at the front draws people close together. You live alongside a man for a day and a night and seem to know everything there is to know about him—what he likes to eat, on which side he sleeps, whether, which God forbid, he grinds his teeth in his sleep, and where his wife has been evacuated to. Often you get to know more about him than you would know about your closest friend in ten years of peacetime. Friendships cemented with the sweat and blood of battle are strong friendships.

Sipping his tea Bogarev asked:

"What do you think, Comrade Mertsalov. Was our night raid on the state farm a success?"

"What a question," laughed Mertsalov. "We burst into the place suddenly by night, the enemy fled, and we captured a populated centre. We ought to get medals for it. Why, do you think it was a failure, Comrade Commissar?"

"Of course it was a failure," answered Bogarev, "a complete failure."

Mertsalov leaned over towards him.

"Why?"

"Why? Because the tanks got away! Do you think that's a joke! With better co-ordination not one of them would have made off. And what really happened? Every battalion commander did as he pleased, knowing nothing of what his neighbour was doing. Well, the result was that the thrust at the centre, where the tanks were concentrated, did not come off. That's the first point. Now the second. The Germans began to retreat. Artillery fire should have been brought to bear on the road along which they had to effect their retreat; we would have simply mowed them down there. But our artillery ceased fire after the preliminary barrage; it seems communication with them was broken off, and they, of course, weren't given a fresh job. We should have smashed the Germans, wiped them out, and they got away.

"And," continued Bogarev, checking off on his fingers, "we omit-

ted to do a lot of other things. For instance, some of the machine guns should have been sent behind the enemy's lines. Why, that grove over there was simply made to order for it. Machine guns should have met the retreating troops, while what we did was to put everything we had into a frontal attack, pushing head-on and in actual fact doing nothing on the flanks."

"That's so," said Mertsalov. "They put up a screen of tommy-gunners and attracted our fire."

"Then what should we be getting medals for?" asked Bogarev, and burst out laughing. "Should we get them because the Regimental Commander, a certain Comrade Mertsalov, instead of directing the fire and movement of rifles, machine guns, tommy guns, heavy and light artillery, company and regimental mortars, himself grabbed up a rifle and led a company in attack? Eh? The situation was unusually complicated. The Regimental Commander shouldn't have gone running round with a rifle in his hand, but should have been thinking until beads of sweat stood out on his forehead, should have been making rapid, clear decisions."

Mertsalov pushed his cup to one side and asked in hurt tones:

"And what else do you think, Comrade Commissar?"

"I think a lot more," laughed Bogarev. "It seems that practically the same thing happened at Moghilev. Each battalion shifted for itself and the Regimental Commander went into the attack with a reconnaissance company."

"Well, and what else?" asked Mertsalov slowly.

"What else is there? The conclusion is quite obvious—there is no co-ordination in the regiment; the units as a rule are late in getting into action, the regiment as a whole moves slowly and clumsily, and communications in the field are rotten, simply rotten. An attacking battalion doesn't know who is on its right flank—friend or foe. Excellent weapons are badly utilized. Mortars, for instance, don't open up at all; you drag them around everywhere, but never fire a bomb out of most of them. The regiment doesn't make any flanking movements, doesn't try to outflank the enemy. Bashes at his centre and that's that."

"Well, well. This is all very interesting," murmured Mertsalov. "And what is the conclusion to be drawn from it?"

"What conclusion?" repeated Bogarev with irritation. "Why, the conclusion is that the regiment fights badly, fights far worse than it should."

"Yes, yes, but the conclusion, the fundamental, basic conclusion, so to speak," Mertsalov persisted.

It was evident that he thought the Commissar would not care to speak out to the end.

But Bogarev went on quite unruffled:

"You're a brave man, you're not afraid for your skin, but you command the regiment badly. That's a fact. This war is an intricate affair. It includes action by aircraft, tanks, all sorts of firearms and ordnance—all of them moving rapidly and working in co-ordination; problems are constantly arising on the battlefield which are more intricate than chess problems and they've got to be solved. Yet you decline to solve them."

"In other words, Mertsalov is no good?"

"No, I'm sure he's all right. But I don't want Mertsalov to think that everything is perfect. If the Mertsalovs are going to believe that, they will never beat the Germans. In this battle of peoples a knowledge of the simple arithmetic of warfare is not enough; to smash the Germans you've got to know the higher mathematics."

Mertsalov made no reply.

"Why don't you drink your tea?" Bogarev asked good-naturedly.

Mertsalov pushed his cup away.

"I don't want any," he said gloomily.

Bogarev smiled.

"There you are," he said. "We became real friendly right away. That pleased me a lot. Here we were drinking tea with the most marvellous raspberry jam. Then I told you several sour, unpleasant things, and that broke up our tea party. You don't think I enjoy making you angry with me, or feeling that you're offended and most likely cursing me up hill and down dale? I don't. But still I'm glad, glad from the bottom of my heart that this has happened. We've not only got to make friends, we've got to win victories. Be angry if you like, Mertsalov, that's your business, but remember—I've told you some very serious things, and I've told you the truth." With that he got up and left the dugout.

Mertsalov followed him with his eyes, scowling. Suddenly he jumped up and began to shout, turning to the Chief of Staff, who had just awakened:

"Comrade Major, did you hear how he dressed me down? Eh?

What am I to him? Eh? Just imagine! I have been made a Hero of the Soviet Union, was wounded four times in the chest. . . ."

The Chief of Staff yawned and said:

"He's a hard man, I knew it from the start."

Mertsalov, without listening to him, went on:

"Just imagine it! Drinks tea with raspberry jam and says as cool as a cucumber: What is the conclusion? Quite simple. You, he says, command the regiment badly. What do you think of that? You could have knocked me over with a feather. And that to me, Mertsalov. . . ."

THE COMMANDERS

THAT NIGHT Colonel Petrov, the Divisional Commander, called Mertsalov on the telephone. It was extremely difficult to carry on a conversation, as the connection kept breaking off and it was very hard to hear. Towards the end of the conversation the line was cut off completely. From what the Colonel had said, Mertsalov gathered that the situation on their division's sector of the front had become much worse during the last few hours. Mertsalov ordered Myshansky to be wakened and sent him to Divisional Headquarters, twelve kilometres away. In an hour Myshansky returned with a written order from the Divisional Commander.

A German tank column with a large force of motorized infantry had penetrated to the rear of the division, taking advantage of the fact that the marsh which lay to the east of a large leafy forest had dried up as a result of the August heat and drought. The Germans had come up to the highway, avoiding the dirt road that was defended by Mertsalov's regiment. In connection with the new situation the division was ordered to entrench itself south of the position it now occupied. Mertsalov's regiment supported by a howitzer unit, was ordered to retire, covering the dirt road.

Myshansky also informed him that while he was still at Divisional Headquarters the telephone wires had been reeled in, stakes had been pulled up and the divisional stores loaded on trucks; that two infantry regiments, the divisional artillery and the howitzer regiment augmenting the latter had already been drawn up at ten that evening ready to march off, while the field hospital had left at six in the evening.

"So you didn't see Anichka?" asked Lieutenant Kozlov.

"What Anichka!" exclaimed Myshansky. "While I was there a

couple of liaison men came in, one of them from Army Headquarters, the other from the neighbour on the right flank, Major Belyaev—I met him before, in Lvov—and he says that on their sector fierce fighting is going on day and night. Our guns have given them a frightful pasting, but they're still pressing."

"Yes, a pretty tough situation is developing," said the Chief of Staff.

Myshansky leaned over and said in a low voice:

"It can all be summed up in one word: 'surrounded.'"

"Chuck that talk about being surrounded," said Mertsalov angrily. "Our job is to carry out orders."

Turning to the orderly he said:

"Send for the Battalion Commanders and the Commander of the howitzer unit. Where is the Commissar?"

"The Commissar is with the sappers," replied the Chief of Staff.

"Ask him to come to Headquarters."

The night was dark, still and fraught with apprehension. There was apprehension in the trembling glimmer of the stars, apprehension rustled faintly under the feet of the sentries, apprehension lurked in the sombre shadows among the motionless trees. Apprehension, snapping dry twigs, glided by the side of the scouts and did not leave them even when they had passed their outposts and were approaching Regimental Headquarters. Apprehension splashed and gurgled in the dark waters of the mill pond. Apprehension was everywhere—in the sky, on the ground, in the water. The time had come when everyone entering Headquarters was scrutinized searchingly in expectation of bad news, when the distant sheet lightning made the men prick up their ears, while at the slightest sound the sentries would throw up their rifles and shout: "Halt, or I'll fire!"

And during this time Bogarev watched Mertsalov, commander of the infantry regiment, with silent admiration. He alone spoke cheerfully, confidently, loudly. He laughed and joked. During these night hours of grave danger the entire weight of responsibility for the lives of thousands of men, for guns, for territory rested on him. Nor was he overwhelmed by this responsibility.

How many valuable spiritual traits blossom and mature in the soul of man in one such night! And over the length and breadth of the entire enormous front thousands of lieutenants, majors, colonels, generals and commissars were experiencing hours and weeks and

months of just such grave responsibility, steeling them and sharpening their wits.

Mertsalov explained the task to the commanders around him. He seemed to be establishing a host of firm contacts between himself and the men lying in the dark woods, standing on guard at the outposts, on duty at the guns, peering through the night in the forward observation points. He was cheerful, calm, simple, this thirty-five-year-old Major with the reddish hair and the bronzed face with its high cheekbones and light eyes, which looked sometimes grey, sometimes blue.

"Shall we order the battalions to stand to?" asked the Chief of Staff.

"Let the men sleep another hour. It doesn't take a soldier long to get up," said Mertsalov. "I bet they sleep in their boots." Turning to Bogarev he said: "Read the Divisional Commander's order."

Bogarev read the order, which gave the regiment its line of march and its mission: one battalion to hold up the movement of the Germans on the dirt road until evening, while the remaining forces were to hold the crossing of the River Uzh.

"Yes, and there's another little matter," said Mertsalov as if he had just remembered some trifle. He wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. "It's devilish hot. Perhaps we should go out and get a breath of fresh air."

For a few seconds they stood silently in the darkness. Then Mertsalov said softly:

"The situation is like this. About fifteen minutes after Myshansky passed along the road, the Germans cut it off. I have no contact with Divisional Headquarters or with our neighbouring units. In a word, the regiment is surrounded. Here's what I've decided: the regiment will proceed to the crossing, carry out its mission, and then fight its way through to join our forces, while Babadjanyan's battalion and the howitzers will remain in the wooded sector of the road in order to hold up the enemy."

There was another silence.

"Those devils keep sending tracer bullets into the sky without a let-up," said Mertsalov.

"Yes, your decision's the correct one," said Bogarev.

"Well, then," Mertsalov was looking at the sky, "... a green flare. I'll stay with the battalion.... There, they've sent up another flare.

"Nothing of the sort," said Bogarev curtly. "It's my job to stay

with the battalion, and I will show you why I must stay while you must lead the regiment."

And he proved this to Mertsalov. They parted in the dark. Bogarev did not see Mertsalov's face, but he felt that the latter remembered the painful conversation they had had over their teacups.

An hour later the regimental transport was drawn up, and on its way, the horses treading noiselessly and whinnying softly as if they understood that they must not disturb the silence of the secret night movement. Red Army men appeared silently out of the darkness and again vanished into darkness. Those who remained regarded them silently from the darkness. In this silent parting of the battalions there was great solemnity and great sorrow.

Before dawn the howitzer unit set out for its position. The gunners dug trenches and dragged branches from the woods to mask the guns. Rumyantsev, Commander of the howitzer unit, and Commissar Nevtulov directed the building of ammunition dumps. They chose the directions whence tanks were likely to appear and, endeavouring to provide for every possible contingency in the forthcoming action, they brought the guns into position, planned, laid communication trenches and indicated where trenches should be dug. They had with them a supply of bottles filled with inflammable liquid and anti-tank grenades, heavy as flatirons. Bogarev explained the task that lay ahead of them.

"It's a hard job," said Rumyantsev, "but we've had them before." He began to talk about the tactics of German panzer attacks, about the strong and weak points of German dive bombers and fighter planes, about the features peculiar to German artillery.

"We have mines with us," said Rumyantsev, "perhaps we should mine the road, Comrade Commissar?"

Nevtulov coughed.

"About a kilometre from the state farm," he said, "there's a place that's ideal for mining—on one side a ravine, on the other a dense wood. The enemy has nowhere to make a detour."

Bogarev agreed with their suggestions.

"How old are you?" he suddenly asked Rumyantsev.

"Twenty-four," replied Rumyantsev, and as if in justification added: "But I've been fighting since the twenty-second of June."

"Well! And how was the fighting?"

"I can tell you in detail," said Nevtulov, "if you have a few minutes to spare, Comrade Commissar."

"Yes, yes, read it, Seryozha. You see, he's been keeping a diary from the very first day," said Rumyantsev.

Nevtulov took a notebook out of his despatch case. By the light of a pocket flash, Bogarev saw that the cover of the notebook was decorated with carefully cut-out coloured paper letters.

Nevtulov began to read:

"On the twenty-second of June the regiment received orders to come to the defence of the country, and at 15:00 Captain Rumyantsev's first unit fired a powerful salvo at the enemy. Twelve 152 mm. howitzers threw one and a half tons of metal on the heads of the fascists every minute....."

"Seryozha writes well," said Rumyantsev earnestly.

"Go on," Bogarev requested.

"On the twenty-third the regiment wiped out two artillery batteries, three mortar batteries and over a regiment of infantry. The fascists retreated eighteen kilometres. That day the howitzer regiment fired one thousand three hundred and eighty shells.

"On the twenty-fifth of June, Captain Rumyantsev's unit kept the bridge at Kamenny Brod under fire. The bridge was destroyed and a company of motorcyclists and two infantry companies were wiped out....."

"Well, and that's how it goes on from day to day," said Captain Rumyantsev. "Doesn't he write well, Comrade Commissar?"

"You fight well, there's no doubt about that," said Bogarev.

"No, but seriously, Seryozha has literary talent," said Rumyantsev. "Why, before the war he even had a story published in the *Smyena*."

"All's well here," thought Bogarev. "I'll go on to Babadjanyan."

As he went, carefully feeling his way along the road, still dazzled after the glare of the flashlight, Rumyantsev's voice came to him: "It's quite certain there'll be no chess tomorrow."

Bogarev stopped and called back:

"Where did you leave the gun tractors, Rumyantsev?"

"All the tractors, the trucks and the gas are in the woods, Comrade Commissar. They can move up to the gun position by a road that is not under enemy fire," came Rumyantsev's voice in the dark.

Bogarev met up with Babadjanyan at the command post. The Battalion Commander reported on his preparations for defence. Lis-

tening to him, Bogarev looked into his black, glittering eyes, at his hollow swarthy cheeks.

"Why such a sad look in your eyes today?" he asked.

Babadjanyan waved his hand.

"From the very beginning of the war, Comrade Commissar, I haven't heard a word from my wife and children, whom I left in Kolomia, six kilometres from the Rumanian border." He smiled wistfully and continued: "Well, you see, I've got it into my head that tomorrow, which is my wife's birthday, I'm certain to get a letter from her. Well, perhaps not a letter, but at least news of some sort. I waited and waited for this day, waited a whole month, and today our regiment was surrounded. And our regimental post was bad enough even when connections were good. Now it's simply all up, there'll be no letters for a long time."

"No, you won't be getting a letter tomorrow," said Bogarev thoughtfully.

"It's an interesting thing," he suddenly went on, "but nowadays I notice that family men who are extremely devoted to their wives, children and mothers somehow fight particularly well."

"That's true," said Babadjanyan. "I can prove that in my own battalion. Take Rodimtsev, he's one of my best men, and there are many like him."

"I know of yet another example in your battalion," said Bogarev pointedly.

"Oh, I say, Comrade Commissar. . . ." stammered Babadjanyan in embarrassment. After a pause, he added: "It's a war for our country. That's why."

IN THE TRENCHES

THE GERMANS came with the dawn. The tankmen had opened the hatches of their tanks and were munching apples and watching the rising sun. Some of them were in shorts and shirts with wide sleeves reaching to the elbow. The heavy leading tank kept somewhat ahead of the column. The commander of this tank, a fleshy German with a string of red coral on his fat white arm, turned his freckled moon face towards the sun and yawned. A long forelock of light hair hung lankly from under his beret. He was sitting on the tank like an idol of bellicose self-confidence, like the god of unjust war. His tank was

already at least six kilometres beyond Marchikhina Buda, but the rattling iron tail of the column had not yet uncurled and was only now slowly twitching through the village square.

Swiftly, like a school of fleet pike suddenly darting in among heavy carp, motorcyclists sped past the tanks. They did not slow down as they swerved past, bouncing up and down furiously over the rough road, the field-green sidecars jogging and shaking as if they were trying to tear loose from the motorcycles. As they passed the leading tank the thin, swarthy, crouching motorcyclists, tanned with riding under the burning sun, quickly raised their hands in greeting, turning their heads, and again seized their handle-bars. The pot-bellied tankman replied with a lazy motion of his puffy hand. The company of motorcyclists shot ahead, raising white clouds of dust as they streaked over the road. The rising sun tinted this dust a rosy hue and it hung wavering over the road as the leading tank, roaring mightily, drove into it.

Whining shrilly, Messerschmitt-109's were flying overhead. The slim dragonfly bodies of the Mes veered right and then left, shot up and then dived as swiftly down. From time to time they passed the head of the tank column, and then they turned back, banking steeply. The noise they made was so high-pitched and penetrating that even the low, powerful rumbling of the tanks could not drown it. Over every wood, every ravine, the Mes dived low, sweeping over the fields of unreaped wheat.

Chugging in the wake of the tanks came black seven-ton trucks with the motorized infantry. The soldiers sat in rows on benches, all of them in forage caps cocked to one side and gripping black tommy guns. The trucks drove through such thick clouds of dust that even the strong rays of the summer sun failed to penetrate them. A broad, long cloud of dust spread over field and meadow, while the trees drowned in the dense turbid fog. The earth seemed to be burning up in stifling, dry smoke.

It was a classical movement of German mobile columns, tried and tested. The fat German in the beret sat in his tank just as he had at five o'clock in the morning on May 10, 1940, when his leading heavy tank had rumbled over the highway that ran through the green vineyards of France. In the same way, at the appointed time to the second, motorcyclists had sped past, while covering aircraft had soared through the skies of France. Early on the clear morning of September 1, 1939, his tank had passed the border on the Polish side amidst the tall

beech trees, while thousands of fleet patches of sunlight had danced noiselessly on the black armour. Thus the tank column had lumbered onto the Belgrade highway, and Serbia's sun-tanned body crunched as it was ground under the swift tank tracks. Thus he had been the first to emerge from the dim pass and catch sight of the vividly blue patch of Salonika Bay and the rock-bound shore.... And he yawned mightily, bored with everything, this idol of unjust war whose photograph appeared in all the Munich, Berlin and Leipzig illustrated newspapers and periodicals.

When the sun rose, Bogarev and the other officers climbed to the top of a hill. Babadjanyan borrowed Rumyantsev's field glasses and scanned the road attentively. Bogarev drank in the picture of morning joy presented by a world that had risen after the night, in the coolness, the dew, the light mist, to the tentative chirps of the grasshoppers. Black beetles scurried over the sand in a business-like, bold way, and ants were going to work. A flock of birds fluttered from the branches of a tree and after attempting to bathe in the dust, which had scarcely been warmed by the first slanting rays of the sun, flew off with cries to the stream.

The impressions which war makes on man are usually powerful, and the immortal world of nature fades before the images born of the war. To the people on the hill it seemed that the fluffy clouds in the sky were traces of exploding anti-aircraft shells, that the distant poplars were tall black columns of smoke and earth raised by heavy high-explosive bombs, that the wedges of storks flying in the heavens were squadrons of fighter planes in battle formation, that the mist in the valley was the smoke of burning villages, while the bushes growing along the road were branches camouflaging truck columns waiting for the signal to start. More than once Bogarev had heard during an air raid in the twilight: "Look, the Germans have sent up a red flare," and the laughing reply: "What are you talking about! That's no flare, that's the evening star." Often heat lightning on some stifling summer evening had been taken for the flashes of gunfire.... And now, when from the east a flock of jackdaws flew swiftly over the tops of the trees through the sky, it seemed that aeroplanes were flying.

"The devil take them," said Nevtulov. "There should be a law forbidding jackdaws to fly before a German attack."

But several seconds later, just like the birds that had darted over the tops of the trees, aircraft appeared. The dark planes flew low, suddenly filling the air with their loud drone.

And along the slope of the hill where the Red Army men were stationed in trenches and bunkers, forage caps flew into the air and hands waved in greeting—the men had seen Red Stars on the wings of the planes.

"They're ours, our own fighters!" exclaimed Babadjanyan.

"They're off on a raid," said Rumyantsev. "Look, look, the leading plane is banking; it must be saying, 'I see the swine, I'm off to pound him.'"

Splendid and strong is the friendship of arms. It has been tried and tested by the men at the front. Sweet and joyous is the thunder of artillery supporting the infantry in battle, the howl of shells flying in the direction in which the troops are attacking. This is not only physical support, it is also moral support, the backing of friendship.

In the field, some ten metres from the dirt road, among the roadside shrubs, pits had been dug. In these pits, up to their chests in the ground, stood men in khaki tunics and forage caps with Red Stars. Fragile glass bottles were lined up at the bottom of the pits, and rifles leaned against the edges. In the men's trouser pockets were gaily-coloured tobacco pouches, match boxes that had been crushed in their sleep, rusks and bits of sugar; in their tunic pockets were smudged pages of letters from their wives in the villages, stubs of pencils, detonators for grenades wrapped up in scraps of newspaper. At the sides of the men standing in the pits canvas haversacks were slung, and in these haversacks were grenades. If you had watched how these pits had been dug, you would have seen how two friends in one place pressed up against each other, while in another five men from the same village, trying to keep as close together as possible, dug their pits so that one practically bordered on the other. And although the Sergeant had said: "Don't stick so close together, boys, that's not the way you do it," still, in this hour of danger, it was good to see the perspiring face of a friend alongside and to shout out: "Hey, don't throw that fag-end away, give me a puff," good to feel the warmth and moisture of the home-rolled cigarette pasted on your lip, while the smoke curled up.

There they stand, up to their chests in the earth, in front of them a bare field, a deserted road.... Twenty minutes will pass, and two-

thousand-pood tanks armed with cannon will roar up in swirling clouds of dust. "Here they come!" the Sergeant will shout. "They're coming, boys, keep your eyes peeled!"

Behind them, on the slope of the hill, are machine-gunners in bunkers, and still higher and farther, behind the machine-gunners, are riflemen in trenches, while behind them are the gun emplacements of the artillery, and beyond them again the command post and the dressing station.... And farther, still farther behind them, are Headquarters, aerodromes, reserves, roads, outposts, forests, cities and stations blacked-out at night. Moscow is there; and still farther, behind them too, the Volga, factories in the rear lit up at night by brilliant electric lights, windowpanes without criss-crossed paper strips, bright white steamers on the Kama. The whole of the splendid land is behind their backs. There they stand in their pits, and no one is in front of them. They stand and smoke tobacco that they have rolled in scraps of newspaper, their palms pressed against the creased and crumpled pages of the letters in the pockets of their tunics. Over them are clouds, a bird flies past, and they stand in the ground up to their chests and wait, looking around. It is they who will have to repulse the onslaught of the tanks. Their eyes no longer see friends, they are watching and waiting for the enemy. When the day of victory and peace comes, let those who are today behind their backs remember these tank-busters, these men in their khaki tunics with the fragile bottles of inflammable liquid, with the canvas haversacks for grenades at their side....

On their left a wide, heavily timbered anti-tank ditch extends from the marshy river to the road; to the right of the road is a forest.

Rodimtsev, Ignatiev and Sedov, the Moscow member of the Young Communist League, are standing chest deep in the ground and watching the road. Their pits are quite close together. On their right, across the road, are Zhavelev, Sergeant-Major Morev, and Junior Political Officer Yeretik—leader of the group of volunteer tank-busters. Behind them are two machine-gun crews—Glagolyev's and Kordakhin's. If you look closely, you can see the machine guns peeping out of dark earth and timber caves on the road. To the right, and behind them, the artillery observers are entrenched, camouflaged by oak branches already beginning to wilt.

"Hey there, tank-busters, let's go fishing; they bite well in the morning!" shouts an artillery observer.

But the tank-busters do not turn their heads to him. It's jolly

enough for him—in front of him is an anti-tank ditch and to his left, between him and the road, the broad backs of the tank-busters in their faded tunics. Watching these backs, the sunburned napes of their necks, the observer jokes.

"How about a smoke?" asks Sedov.

"Not a bad idea," says Ignatiev.

"Have some of mine, it's got a kick in it," offers Rodimtsev and throws Ignatiev a flat eau de Cologne bottle half-filled with makhorka.

"And what about you?" Ignatiev asks him.

"I've smoked so much my mouth feels like shoe leather. I'd rather chew on a rusk. Chuck me one of yours, they're whiter."

Ignatiev throws him a rusk. Rodimtsev carefully blows the fine sand and tobacco dust from the rusk and takes a bite.

"If only they'd come quickly," says Sedov and puffs away at his cigarette. "There's nothing worse than waiting."

"You getting bored?" asks Ignatiev. "I forgot to bring my guitar."

"Cut out the funny stuff," says Rodimtsev in a huff.

"Still it's pretty terrifying, boys," says Sedov. "The road lying so white and dead, not a stir out of it. If I live to be a hundred I'll never forget this."

Ignatiev says nothing and stares straight ahead, raising himself slightly over the edge of his pit on the palms of his hands.

"Last year at this time I was in a rest home," says Sedov, and spits angrily. The silence of his comrades annoys him. He sees that Rodimtsev, just like Ignatiev, is staring, his neck slightly craned.

"Sergeant-Major, the Germans!" shouts Rodimtsev.

"They're coming!" says Sedov and sighs softly.

"Some dust they're raising," grumbles Rodimtsev. "You'd think it was a thousand bulls."

"And we're going to tackle them with bottles!" shouts Sedov, and laughs, spits, curses. His nerves are strained to the breaking point; his heart races frantically; the palms of his hands are wet with warm perspiration. He wipes them on the crunchy edge of the sand pit.

Ignatiev is silent, his eyes fixed on the dust rising over the road.

The telephone rang at the command post. Rumyantsev answered. The observer was speaking—the advanced detachment of German motorcyclists had ridden onto the mined sector. Some of the motorcycles

had been blown up on either side of the road, but the rest had gone ahead and were again moving along the road.

"There they are," exclaimed Babadjanyan. "We'll give them a welcome now."

He got Lieutenant Kosyuk, Commander of the machine-gun company, on the telephone and gave him orders to allow the motorcyclists to come within close range and then to open fire with his machine guns.

"How many metres?" asked Kosyuk.

"What do you need metres for?" asked Babadjanyan. "Up to the dead tree on the right-hand side of the road."

"Up to the dead tree," repeated Kosyuk.

Three minutes later the machine guns opened fire. The first burst fell short. Puffs of dust rose in the road, as if a long flock of sparrows were furiously bathing in the dust. The Germans opened fire as they sped along. They could not see their target, but their unaimed fire was extremely concentrated and the whole atmosphere rang and filled with invisible death-dealing streams. Wreaths of dust and smoke, merging in a single cloud, crept up the hillside. The Red Army men in the trenches and bunkers crouched down, gazing apprehensively into the singing blue air above them.

Just then the machine guns sent a burst directly into the speeding column of motorcyclists. A second before it had seemed as if no power on earth could stop this flying detachment from which the bullets whistled. And now the detachment turned into dust before the men's very eyes. The motorcycles stopped short and fell flat, their wheels continuing to spin, raising the dust. Those of the motorcyclists who were unscathed turned into the field. A heavy shower of rifle bullets sped after them.

"Well, what do you say?" Babadjanyan asked Rumyantsev. "What do you say, comrades artillerymen? Our machine-gunners are not so bad, are they?"

A young German who had fallen with a wounded or injured leg pulled himself from under his overturned motorcycle and raised his hands. The firing ceased. He stood there a moment in his torn uniform, an expression of suffering and terror on his filthy, blood-streaked face, stretching and stretching his hands upwards, as if he were reaching for apples on a high branch. Then he began to shout, and limping along slowly, waving his raised arms, advanced in the direction of

our trenches. He kept up his shouting as he came on, and gradually a loud guffaw spread from trench to trench, from bunker to bunker. The figure of the German with the upstretched arms could be seen plainly from the command post, and the commanders could not understand why such a roar of laughter had begun among the men. Just then the telephone rang and from the forward O.P. the reason for the sudden hilarity was explained.

"Comrade Battalion Commander," shouted Kosyuk into the receiver, choking with laughter, "that German is hobbling along and shouting loud enough to wake the dead: 'Russ, surrender!' And he with his hands up in the air.... He's so scared that he's all mixed up with his Russian."

Laughing with the others, Bogarev thought: "This is fine, such laughter when tanks are approaching, it's simply splendid." Turning to Rumyantsev he asked:

"Everything all set, Comrade Captain?"

"Everything's O.K., Comrade Commissar. We made our calculations beforehand. The guns are laid. We're going to open up concentrated fire along the whole sector over which the tanks will pass."

"Aircraft!" several voices called out in chorus.

And simultaneously two telephones began to ring.

"They're coming. The leading tank is two thousand metres away," drawled Rumyantsev. His eyes had become stern, serious, but his mouth was still smiling.

WHATEVER THE COST—STAND FAST!

THE PLANES and the tanks appeared almost at the same time. Six Messerschmitt-109's came flying low over the ground. Above them were two flights of bombers, and still higher, at an altitude of nearly 5,000 feet, a flight of Messerschmitts.

"The classic formation before a bombardment," remarked Nevtulov. "The planes below cover the aircraft as they come out of a dive; those above cover them when they go into a dive. Now they're going to make it lively for us."

"We'll have to come out of cover," said Rumyantsev. "Can't be helped, but we'll give it to them hot." And he ordered the battery commanders to open fire.

Bogarev took up the telephone receiver. "Fire!" could be heard,

and several seconds later all other sounds were drowned out by the deafening crash of the salvoes that thundered fiercely in his ears. And immediately after came the penetrating, soughing sound of the airstream caused by the flying shells. It sounded as if whole groves of tall poplars, aspens and young birch were soughing and rustling with millions of tender leaves, bowing and swaying in a great wind. The strong, elastic tissue of the wind seemed to tear on the slender twigs, and it felt as if the wind raised by the flying steel would carry away people, and even the earth itself, as it rushed impetuously past. The sound of the explosions came from a distance. One, two, several together, then another.

Bogarev listened to a distant voice calling corrections. In the very tone of these drawling voices that spoke only figures was expressed all the passion and heat of the fighting. Figures triumphed and raged, figures that had come to life, thrilling, both icy and fiery at the same time.

And all the time the bombers were circling overhead, in search of their target.

Nevtulov dashed over to the gun position.

"You're not to cease fire under any circumstances!" he shouted to the commander of the 1st Battery.

Two Junkers dived over the guns. The four-barrelled AA machine guns sent burst after burst at them.

"Some diving," said Nevtulov, "pretty steep, I'll say!"

"Fire!" shouted the Lieutenant.

The three-gun battery fired a salvo. The thunder of the salvo merged into the thunder of bursting bombs. Earth and sand showered down on the gunners.

Wiping their perspiring and grimy faces, they reloaded.

"Morozov, are you all right?" shouted the Lieutenant.

"Quite all right, Comrade Lieutenant," replied the gunner. "Let's make it more lively, Comrade Lieutenant."

"Fire!" came the order from the Lieutenant.

The remaining planes circled over the forward position from which came the sound of machine guns and the frequent explosions of bombs.

The gunners worked with dogged fury, with passionate zeal. In their co-ordinated movements, their set purpose and endeavours united by brotherhood, was expressed the triumphant might of joint labour.

Here there were no longer individual people working—a gaunt Georgian; a broad-shouldered, thickset Tatar; a Jew; a black-eyed Ukrainian, a stocky Russian—here was one person working. He cast a glance at the Junkers as they came out of their dive, banked steeply and came in at the battery again, wiped away the perspiration, laughed shortly, whooped together with the roar of the cannon, and once again bent to his skilled and intricate task—nimble-fingered, swift, the noble sweat of labour washing all trace of fear from his face. He, this man, also worked on the second and third guns of the 1st Battery, and on the guns of the 2nd Battery. He neither halted nor lay down, nor did he run to take shelter when bombs came hurtling down. He did not stop working under the iron blows of the explosions. Nor did he stop to look up and gloat when the men of the 3rd Company lying in reserve shouted: "The ack-ack's got him. He's gone down in flames!" He wasted no time, he worked. For these men only one word existed: "Fire!" And this word, wedded to their labour, gave birth to fire.

Gunner Morozov, his hair bristling, his face all over freckles, shouted: "Let's make it more lively!" And the observers, watching the crushing effect of the gunners' work, kept pouring figures, figures, figures into the fire.

Shells began to burst in the midst of the tank column, quite unexpectedly for the Germans. The first shell hit the turret of a heavy tank and carried it away. From the observation point the observers could see through their field glasses how the tankmen hastily withdrew their heads from the hatches and hid below.

"Just like weasels crawling into their holes, Comrade Lieutenant." remarked a scout who was in the artillery O.P.

"Yes, they do look like that," said the Lieutenant, and turned to the telephonist:

"Ogurechenko, get No. 4."

Only the fat tankman in the leading tank did not take shelter below. He waved his arm with its string of red coral as if he were trying to put heart into the machines that were following in his wake. Then he took an apple from his pocket and bit into it. The column moved on without breaking formation. Only in those places where the crippled tanks blocked the road did the drivers make a detour around the burning wreckage. Some of the tanks did not turn onto the road again, but continued on over the field.

Some two kilometres from the fortified zone, the tanks broke column and deployed in open order. Hemmed in on the right by the forest, on the left by the river, they advanced in a fairly solid mass of several tanks deep. About twenty tanks were burning on the road.

A solid sheet of Russian artillery fire began to spread fanwise over the fields. The tanks opened up in reply; their first shells flew over the tank-busters and burst in the infantry lines on the slope of the hill. Then the Germans directed their fire higher, evidently endeavouring to silence the Russian guns. A large number of the tanks had halted. A German target spotter appeared in the air. He established radio connections with the tanks. The radio operator at the Soviet command post said complainingly:

"Might as well be a hammer banging away as far as I'm concerned, comrades. That German just keeps rapping out: *'Gut, gut, gut.'* "

"That's all right," said Bogarev. "*Gut*, but not so very!"

"The tanks will launch an attack now, Comrade Commissar," Babadjanyan whispered to Bogarev. "I already know their tactics—it's the third time that I see them."

He gave orders by telephone to bring the mortars into action and added:

"That much for the field post on my wife's birthday."

"In case of a breakthrough it would be better to withdraw the artillery," said an artillery lieutenant.

But Rumyantsev only replied irritably:

"If we start withdrawing the guns then the Germans will surely break through and wipe out the whole lot of you. Comrade Commissar, allow me to move two batteries forward and work at point-blank range."

"Do so immediately: don't lose a second," urged Bogarev agitatedly. He realized that the decisive moment had come.

The Germans had obviously taken the cessation of fire to mean that the artillery had withdrawn, and they intensified their own fire. Several minutes later the tanks launched their attack all along the line. They came on at high speed, cannon and machine guns blazing away.

Several Red Army men, crouching low, dashed out of the upper bunker. One of them fell, hit by a stray bullet, the others, crouching still lower, ran past the command post.

Babadjanyan came out to meet them.

"Where do you think you're going?" he shouted.

"Tanks, Comrade Captain!" gasped one of the Red Army men.

"What's the matter with you, got a bellyache? What's the idea of doubling over like that?" yelled Babadjanyan in a fury. "Heads up! The tanks are coming? Well, you've got to meet them, not run like rabbits. Back to your places, march!"

Meanwhile the howitzers had opened fire. Only now did the gunners see the enemy. The blows of the heavy shells were shattering. Direct hits made the metal curl up; flames shot from the hatches, rising in columns over the tanks. Besides the direct hits, the heavy splinters of the tremendous shells pierced the tanks' armour, and crippled their tracks. The tank motors roared while the tanks spun round in one spot.

"Our artillery's not so bad," shouted Rumyantsev into the ear of the Battalion Commander, "not so bad, eh, Comrade Babadjanyan?"

The assault of the tanks was halted all along the field. But in the zone through which the dirt road passed, the Germans succeeded in moving ahead. The heavy leading tank, cannon booming and machine guns chattering away, broke into the area where a detachment of tank-busters was stationed. Following it, four tanks came on full tilt.

The artillery fire had weakened—two guns had been crippled and were out of action, the third had been completely wrecked by a direct hit. Orderlies had carried off the severely wounded gunners. The bodies of those who had been killed were still in position at the guns—the men had fought to their last breath.

"Well, boys, now's the time.... Whatever the cost—stand fast!" shouted Rodimtsev.

The three of them grabbed up incendiary bottles.

Sedov was the first to rise from the pit. The leading tank was making straight for him. A machine-gun burst got Sedov in the chest and head, and he fell to the bottom of the pit.

Ignatiev saw his comrade die. A machine-gun burst flew over his head, the bullets burying themselves in the ground. The tank was already quite close—Ignatiev even took a step back. For an instant he had a vivid flash back of how he had stood as a boy in a railway station to which his father had driven some passengers in his cart, while nearby, giving off warmth and the smell of burning oil, the

locomotive of an express train had thundered past. He straightened up and flung the bottle, at the same time thinking almost in desperation:

"Fat lot you can do to a locomotive with a quart bottle!"

The bottle landed in the turret—a light, flickering flame immediately sprang up and was fanned by the wind.

At that instant Rodimtsev threw a bundle of grenades under the track of the second tank. Ignatiev threw another bottle.

"This one is smaller," flashed through his head. "A pint will do for it."

The huge leading tank was crippled. Evidently the driver made an attempt to reverse it, but the flames prevented him from doing so. The upper hatch opened and Germans armed with tommy guns crawled out hastily, shielding their faces from the flames and jumping to the ground.

It was as if instinct told Ignatiev: "That one killed Sedov."

"Halt!" he shouted, and seizing his rifle he jumped out of the pit.

The enormous, broad-shouldered, pot-bellied German with the string of coral on his arm was the only one to remain on the field. The other members of his crew, crouching low, had fled. This German alone remained standing there, massive and erect. When he caught sight of Ignatiev running towards him with his rifle, he let fly with his tommy gun, firing from the hip. The burst missed Ignatiev, except for the last bullets, which hit his rifle, splintering the butt. Ignatiev halted for a bare second, then rushed at the German. The German made an attempt to reload his tommy gun, but saw that he would not manage to do it in time. He was not afraid, everything went to show that he was no coward. With a step that was both heavy and light, he lunged at Ignatiev.

Ignatiev saw red. This was the man who had killed Sedov, who in a single night had set fire to a big city, who had murdered the beautiful Ukrainian girl, who had trampled down the fields, razed the white cottages, brought shame and death to the people.

"Hey there, Ignatiev!" came the voice of the Sergeant-Major from the distance.

The German was confident of his own strength and valour. He had gone through many years of military training. He knew all the tricks of hand-to-hand fighting.

"*Komm, komm*, Ivan!" he shouted.

He was drunk with the grandeur of his own pose. One among burning tanks, under the thunder of bursting shells, he stood impassively, on this conquered territory, he, who had marched through Belgium and France, who had stalked through Belgrade and Athens, he, the great warrior on whose breast Hitler himself had pinned the Iron Cross.

The ancient days of single combat seemed to have returned, and it was as if scores of eyes were fixed on these two men who had come to grips on this battle-scarred soil. Ignatiev, the man from Tula, swung his arm. Frightful and simple was the blow of this Russian soldier.

"You swine! Go around killing girls, will you!" Ignatiev gasped hoarsely.

A rifle shot cracked dryly and briefly. It was Rodimtsev who had fired.

The German attack was beaten off. Four times the German tanks and mobile infantry launched an assault. And four times Babadjanyan led his battalion, armed with grenades and bottles of inflammable liquid, against the Germans.

Hoarsely the battery commanders shouted their orders, but the voice of the cannon roared less and less frequently....

The men died simply on the field of battle.

"No more chess games with you, Vasya," said Commissar Nevtulov. A large-calibre bullet had got him in the chest, and blood trickled from his mouth with every breath. Rumyantsev kissed him and wept.

"Fire!" shouted the Battery Commander. And Nevtulov's last whisper was drowned in the thunder of the cannon.

Babadjanyan was fatally wounded in the stomach during the fourth attack of the German tanks. The men placed him on a folded ground sheet and wanted to carry him from the field.

"I still have my voice to give commands," he said.

And until the attack was repulsed, his voice was heard by the men. He died in Bogarev's arms.

"Don't forget me, Commissar," he said. "During these days I've found a friend in you."

The men died. Who will tell of their brave deeds? Only the swift clouds saw how Private Ryabokon fought to the last cartridge; how Political Officer Yeretik, after felling a dozen of the enemy. blew

himself up with a fast cooling hand; how Red Army man Glushko, surrounded by the Germans, fired to his last breath; how machine-gunners Glagolyev and Kordakhin, faint with loss of blood, fought as long as their weakening fingers could press the trigger, as long as their dimming eyes could see the target through the sultry haze of the battle.

Great indeed is the people whose sons die so nobly, simply and grimly on the vast fields of battle. The sky and the stars know of them; the earth has heard their last sighs; the unreaped rye and the wayside groves have seen their feats of valour. They sleep in the earth, over them the sky, the sun and the clouds. They sleep deeply, wrapped in eternal slumber, sleep as their fathers and grandfathers, carpenters, navvies, miners, weavers, farmers of the great land, who spent their whole life in toil. They have given this land much arduous labour, sometimes almost beyond their strength. The hour of war came, and they gave it their blood and their very lives. Let this land, then, be famed for labour, reason, honour and liberty. Let there be no grander or more sacred word than the word "people."

At night, after the dead had been buried, Bogarev came into the dugout.

"Comrade Commissar," said the orderly, "the runner has come."

"What runner?" asked Bogarev in surprise. "Where from?"

A short Red Army man had come into the dugout carrying a haversack and a rifle.

"Where are you from, comrade?"

"From Divisional Headquarters. I've brought the mail."

"How under the sun did you get through? The road is cut off."

"I managed to get through, Comrade Commissar. I crawled on my belly for about four kilometres, crossed the river at night, shot the German sentry—here, I've brought his badge with me."

"Pretty terrifying getting through, wasn't it?" asked Bogarev.

"What is there to be afraid of?" said the Red Army man laughing.

"Do you really feel that way?" asked Bogarev seriously. "Do you really feel that way?"

The Red Army man smiled and held out the package of letters he had brought.

The first letter was for Babadjanyan. Bogarev glanced at the return address. The letter had come from Erevan, from Babadjanyan's wife.

Company Commanders Ovchinnikov and Shuleikin and Political Officer Makhotkin were quickly sorting the letters and saying in undertones:

"This one's present . . . killed . . . killed . . . killed. . . . This one's present. . . . Killed. . . ." and placing the letters of the killed in a separate pile.

Bogarev took Babadjanyan's letter and went to his grave. He placed the letter on the mound, covered it with earth and pressed it down with a shell splinter.

He stood for a long time at the grave of the Battalion Commander.

"And when will I get a letter from you, Lisa?" he asked out loud.

At 3 p.m. the radio operator took down a brief code message. The Army Commander thanked the men and commanders for their bravery. The losses they had inflicted on the German tanks were enormous and they had carried out their mission brilliantly, holding up the movement of a powerful column. The survivors were ordered to withdraw.

Bogarev knew that there was nowhere to withdraw. Scouts had reported a night movement of the Germans along the village roads intersecting the dirt road.

The commanders came to him with apprehensive questions.

"We are surrounded," they said.

After Babadjanyan's death, Bogarev had to make his decisions alone. That phrase which the men so often repeat at the front: "I sized up the situation and made a decision"—even if it was merely a question of where to stop for the night or dinner—was now solemnly uttered for the first time by Bogarev when he addressed the Commanders and Political Officers who had gathered in the dugout.

He was amazed at himself when he said these words and thought: "If only Lisa could see me now." Yes, that was a frequently recurring wish.

"Comrades Commanders, here is what I have decided," said Bogarev. "We shall withdraw to the woods. There we'll rest, reorganize and fight our way to the river in order to cross to the east bank. I appoint Captain Rumyantsev my second in command. We shall set out in exactly one hour."

He looked around at the exhausted faces of the commanders, at Rumyantsev's grim face, which had aged so, and in quite another tone of voice, reminding Bogarev himself of pre-war Moscow, said:

"My friends, it is like this, in blood and fire, that we are forging our victory. Let us rise in honour of our true friends who have fallen in today's battle—Red Army men, Political Officers and Commanders."

AT FRONT HEADQUARTERS

FRONT HEADQUARTERS was located in a forest. The members of the operations and intelligence departments, the Political Department and the advanced Supply Service lived in huts and dugouts camouflaged with green branches. Desks stood under dense hazel bushes, and orderlies walked along enchanting acorn-carpeted paths and filled inkwells. In the morning the clatter of typewriters under the dewy leaves drowned out the song of the birds. Through the tangled underbrush could be seen the fair heads of women, and women's laughter mingled with the gruff voices of the clerks. In a high dimly-lit hut stood enormous desks with maps spread on them. Sentries paced around this hut. The sentry at the entrance filed the passes on a nail that had been hammered into an old hollow tree. At night the rotten tree stumps glowed with a bluish light. The Staff always lived its life unchanged, whether it was quartered in the ancient halls of a Polish mansion, or in the cottages of some large village, or in the forest. And the forest also lived its life—the squirrels laid up their winter supplies, mischievously dropping acorns on the heads of the typists; woodpeckers pecked away at the trees, spearing grubs, kites skimmed over the tops of the oaks, aspens and lindens; fledgelings tried the strength of their wings, and millions of red and black ants, beetles and carabids scurried about and worked.

Occasionally Messerschmitts appeared in the clear sky, circling over the forest in search of troops and Headquarters.

"A-i-r-cr-a-ft!" the sentries would shout at such times. The typists would gather the papers from their desks and throw dark kerchiefs over their heads, while the commanders removed their caps so that the shine of the visors would not be visible. The Staff barber hastily bundled up his towels and wiped the lather from the unshaven cheek of his customer, and the waitresses put green branches over the plates that had been set out for dinner. Silence fell, broken only by the droning of the planes and the hearty, cheery voice of the pink-cheeked Artillery General bawling out his subordinates in the pine grove on the little sand hill, where the Ordnance Department was located.

And just as in the dimly-lit, arched hall of the palace, so too in the leafy hut where the Military Council met, a bowl of green apples was set out for the Commander and boxes of "Severnaya Palmyra" cigarettes for the members of the conference.

Front H.Q. was located forty kilometres from the forward position. On evenings when there was no wind and the treetops no longer swooshed, the sound of gunfire could be heard clearly. The Chief of Staff considered that Headquarters should be moved farther back, at least seventy or eighty kilometres away from the front. But the Commander-in-Chief hesitated about withdrawing. He liked being near the front. From his location he was able to visit the advanced divisions and regiments frequently and observe the course of the fighting personally, yet be back at Headquarters and the huge operations map within forty minutes.

On that day, Headquarters had been in a state of alarm since morning. German tank columns had reached the river. The rumour had reached H.Q. that motorcyclists had been seen on this side of the river. Evidently they had crossed on big flat-bottomed boats, and had reached the fringe of the forest where Headquarters was located.

The Staff Commissar reported this to Yeremin, who was standing near a hazel bush and picking the ripe nuts. The Staff Commanders who had come in with the Commissar scanned the face of the Commander-in-Chief apprehensively, but the news seemed to have made no impression whatever on him. He nodded his head to show that he had heard what the Staff Commissar had reported and said to his adjutant:

"Lazarev, would you pull down that branch? Just look, there are dozens of nuts on it."

The men standing around him watched attentively as Yeremin industriously picked the nuts from the branch. Apparently he had good eyesight—not a single nut remained, even of those that were cunningly hidden in their green husks among the rustling leaves. This lesson in coolness lasted a fairly long time.

Then Yeremin walked over briskly to the various heads of departments who were waiting for him and said:

"I know, I know why you've come. Headquarters remain here. We're not moving anywhere. After this kindly report to me only when I send for you."

The embarrassed department heads dispersed. Several minutes

later the adjutant informed Yeremin that Samarin, Army Group Commander, was on the wire.

Yeremin went into the hut.

He listened to what Samarin had to say, repeating from time to time: "Yes, yes." And in the very same tone of voice in which he had uttered this "Yes, yes," said:

"Listen here, Samarin, casualties or no casualties, I've given you certain orders to carry out, and even if you're the last man left you are to carry them out. Is that clear?"

Then he said: "I'm glad that it's clear," and hung up the receiver.

Cherednichenko, who had listened to this conversation, said:

"Apparently things are in a bad way with Samarin. He wouldn't say anything just like that."

"Yes, Samarin is a man of iron."

"That's so—an iron man, but all the same I'm going to this iron man tomorrow."

"What a day, what a wonderful day," murmured Yeremin. "Would you like some nuts? I picked them myself."

"I saw you," said Cherednichenko smiling, and helped himself to a handful.

"You did?" said Yeremin briskly. "Heard about the motorcyclists and came to the conclusion that I'll be moving Headquarters."

"Never mind, never mind," said Cherednichenko. "I've watched at least two hundred new men who've come in, and I remember what they looked like when they came—brand new tunics, pale faces, white hands, and unsteady eyes. It was easy to see that they'd been sitting in academies or the like all their lives. And with every day they change: their noses peel, their hands get brown, their tunics no longer look so new. The sun weathers their faces and even their eyebrows bleach in the sun. You look at a man and you can see how his skin has toughened from the sun and wind, and he has become weathered inside too."

"Yes, yes," said Yeremin. "That's all very well. But I must admit that I don't consider it any particular merit on the part of the men that they've learned how to fight, grown tough, become accustomed. Where's the credit in that? They're military men, devil take it!"

Turning to his adjutant he asked:

"Will dinner be ready soon?"

"They're setting the table now," said the orderly.

"Fine," said Yeremin. "Don't wade into those nuts before dinner." He shrugged his shoulders. "In my opinion it's not enough for a commander to get tougher, to acquire experience, to grow wise. A commander must live a full life in wartime, sleep well, eat well, read, be cheerful, calm, keep his hair trimmed in the way that's most becoming to him and in style, and at the same time he must smash out at any aircraft and tanks that have outflanked him, must wipe out both motorcyclists and tommy-gunners and all the rest of them. And as a result of all this fighting he'll only find it better and more restful to live in this world. That's a military man for you. Do you remember the time we ate *vareniki* and cream in that regiment?"

Cherednichenko chuckled.

"That's the time the cook kept complaining: 'Keeps dive bombing and dive bombing, that swine! Doesn't give me a chance to make the things properly!' "

"That's it, that's it—'keeps dive bombing, the swine, and doesn't give me a chance to make the things properly.' Those were good *vareniki* though, I must say!"

Cherednichenko walked closer to Yeremin and in a voice that had gone hoarse said:

"We'll pound them all right. They'll run yet, you'll see, they'll run. And they'll curse that day—the twenty-second of June—curse that hour—four in the morning—they'll curse it. And their sons and grandsons and great-grandsons will curse it."

In the course of the day, air reconnaissance confirmed the information that had been brought in by a wounded lieutenant who had made his way out of enemy encirclement. German tank columns, which had arrived by various roads, were beginning to concentrate in the Gorelovets area. The Lieutenant had pointed out on the map the low lying ground, sparsely planted with firs, where the Germans were concentrating. Aerial photos confirmed this. Herdsmen who had made their way across the river informed the scouts that in the afternoon, after the women had gone to milk the cows, two more columns of mobile infantry had arrived in the district where the Germans were concentrating. This spot was twenty-two kilometres from the river. Knowing the weakness of our aircraft on this sector of the front, the Germans felt quite easy. Armoured fighting vehicles and trucks were massed together closely, all but touching one another, and when dusk

had fallen some of them had switched on their headlights, in the rays of which the cooks had cleaned vegetables for the next day.

The Commander of the Front sent for the Chief of Artillery.

"Can you reach that far?" he asked pointing to an oval marked on the map.

"I can cover it, Comrade Lieutenant-General," was the reply.

The guns of the heavy artillery reserve of the High Command were at Yeremin's disposal. These were the huge steel monsters that Bogarev had encountered on the day he had come to Headquarters. Many of the Staff had feared that it would be impossible to bring the huge cannon across the river, as this would require an unusually strong bridge. Bogarev did not know that the operation at the state farm and the destruction of the tank column had given the sappers time to build a bridge across which the mighty guns had come.

"At twenty-two hours concentrate all your guns on that target," the Commander ordered the Chief of Artillery.

The Artillery Chief, a ruddy-faced General, who was almost always smiling, loved his wife, his old mother, his daughters and son. He loved many things in life—hunting, a lively discussion, Georgian wine, and a good book. But most of all he loved his long-range guns. He was their servant and admirer. He felt the destruction of every heavy gun as a personal loss. It grieved him that in the present fast-moving warfare there was no occasion to make full use of long-range guns. When so many heavy guns had concentrated in the H.Q. district, the General had been greatly agitated, happy and sad at the same time—would there be an opportunity to use them? And the moment when Yeremin had said: "Open fire from all your guns," was probably the most triumphant and happiest moment in all his life.

That evening the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Byelorussia met in a woodland glade. The bright evening sky shone through the branches of the oaks. Dry grey leaves that looked as if they had been strewn by the careful hand of a housewife covered the festive carpet of springy, dark green moss.

Who can convey the severe simplicity of this meeting on the last free patch of Byelorussian woodland! The wind, blowing from Byelorussia, murmured sadly and solemnly, as if a million voices were whispering in the oak leaves. The People's Commissars and members of the Central Committee, their faces haggard and burned with the sun, wearing military tunics, spoke briefly.

Thousands of wires seemed to reach out from this woodland glade to Gomel and Moghilev, Minsk and Bobruisk, Rogachev and Smolevichi, to the villages and towns, gardens and orchards, fields and swamps of Byelorussia.... And the evening wind sounded among the dark leaves with the sad, calm voice of a people who knew that it had no choice but to die in slavery or to fight for liberty.

Dusk fell. The artillery opened fire. Spurts of flame lit up the dark west. The trunks of the oaks emerged from the shadows, as if the whole thousand-trunked forest had made a step forward and then halted in the trembling white light. These were no isolated salvoes. It was thus that the air had howled over the earth in the far-off prehistoric days, when the mountain chains of present-day Asia and Europe had risen from the depths of the ocean.

Two war correspondents and a press photographer were sitting on a log near the premises of the Military Council. They were watching the sensational scene before them in silence.

From the leafy hut Yeremin's voice carried to them:

"I say, comrades, do you remember Pushkin's 'Travels in Arzrum' and the splendid description...."

The rest of the sentence was inaudible. A few minutes later they could again hear a slow, calm voice, and by the intonation recognized it as Divisional Commissar Cherednichenko's.

"You know, I like Garshin. There's a man who described the life of a soldier truthfully."

At 22:50 the Commander-in-Chief and the Artillery Chief flew over the valley where the German panzer columns were concentrated. What they saw there would be a source of pride and joy to the Artillery General for the rest of his days.

THE GENERAL

MAJOR-GENERAL Samarin, Army Group Commander, had as one of his tasks to keep open the crossings over the river. Staff Headquarters, the rear, the office of the Army newspaper—in short, both the second and the first echelons were located on the east bank of the river. Samarin set up his forward command post on the west bank, in a small village at the edge of a large unharvested field. With him were only Major Garan of the Operations Branch and the grey-haired Colonel Nabashidze, Artillery Commander; he had his field radio,

and a telegraph line and the usual field telephones connecting him with the unit commanders. He himself was billeted in a light, roomy cottage, and there he worked, received his commanders, and dined. He slept in the hayloft, as he could not bear stuffiness.

Samarin's A.D.C., Lyadov, snub-nosed, very red-cheeked and very black-eyed, and the melancholy cook, who always sang "A Blue Scarf" before he went to sleep, slept in the cottage on camp beds.

With them was also Klyukhin, the driver of a small khaki car that could go almost anywhere. From the very outbreak of the war he had constantly carried about with him a copy of *David Copperfield*. By June 22 he had read only fourteen pages of Dickens' novel, and since then he had been unable to get on with his reading as Samarin did not give his men much leisure. Once the cook had asked Klyukhin whether the fat volume he always had with him was a good book. "Worth reading," Klyukhin had answered. "It's about Jewish life."

At dawn Samarin came down from the hayloft and Lyadov went to meet him with a big pitcher and a white towel. He poured the cold well water on the little General's neck, which was covered with fine red hair, and asked:

"Did you sleep well, Comrade Major-General? All last night the Germans kept sending tracers out of the woods."

Samarin was a stern, silent man. He was absolutely fearless and often drove Lyadov to desperation by visiting the most dangerous sectors of the front. He rode over the battlefields with unhurried, proprietory confidence, and showed up at regimental and battalion command posts at critical moments of the fighting. He always wore all his decorations and walked about among bursting bombs and shells with the Gold Star of a Hero of the Soviet Union on his chest. Whenever he visited a regiment in action, amidst the chaos of bursting shells and rifle fire, amidst the smoke and flame of burning cottages and barns, in all the vivid confusion of infantry coming to grips and the movement of Soviet and enemy tanks, he would immediately grasp the essence of the situation. His curt voice and gloomy, harsh, big-nosed face, which seldom smiled, were familiar to all the commanders of divisions, regiments and battalions. As soon as he arrived at the regiment, he seemed to blot out the booming of the guns and the fire of conflagrations, gathering in himself for a moment all the strain of the fighting. He never stayed long at a command post, but his presence made itself felt in all the subsequent operations, just as if his calm,

cold gaze was still fixed on the faces of the commanders. If he saw an operation being directed badly, he never hesitated to remove the officers in charge. Once he had sent a major, a regimental commander, into an attack as a private to atone for his irresolution and fear of exposing himself to danger, and reluctance to take the responsibility for making a decision. Severely and without mercy he meted out the death penalty for cowardice in action.

His hatred and disgust for the enemy were boundless. Walking through a burning street in a village to which the Germans had set fire, his face would become terrible. The men related how Samarin, who had come into the thick of the fighting in an armoured car, had picked up a wounded Red Army man and given up his own place to him while he himself had followed the car on foot under withering enemy fire. They told how he had once picked up a rifle that a Red Army man had thrown down during the fighting. In front of the assembled company he had diligently and lovingly wiped the muddied rifle and silently handed it over to the Red Army man, who had all but died of shame. And the men whom he led in battle had faith in him, and forgave him his severity and strictness.

Lyadov knew his General well. Often, when driving to the forward position Lyadov asked the way from passing commanders and on returning to the car reported:

"Comrade Major-General, the car can't get through, no one goes this way. The road is under mortar fire and they say there are tommy-gunners ambushed in the woods. I'll have to look for a detour."

Tapping a fat cigarette on his thumbnail and lighting up, Samarin answered:

"Tommy-gunners? Never mind; you just drive straight ahead."

Huddled up with fright, Lyadov crouched on the seat behind his General. Like many timid people he carried a formidable array of weapons. He had about him an automatic, a Mauser, a Nagan and a Browning, while in his pockets were another Mauser and a trophy Parabellum. Once Samarin had sent him to the rear on a mission. He had thrilled the women he had met in the trains with his stories and formidable appearance, and even the station masters had been duly impressed. Actually, however, he had probably never fired even a single shot from his numerous revolvers and pistols.

Samarin spent the whole day at the forward position. The Germans had intensified their pressure on all the sectors of his group. Hostilities

never ceased night or day. The Red Army men were often too exhausted by the heat and the stifling weather to eat the hot food which was brought to them in the trenches.

Samarin had returned to the command post and called Yeremin on the telephone, asking for permission to withdraw to the east bank of the river. Yeremin had refused permission categorically. The conversation with Yeremin had spoiled the Major-General's mood. When Major Garan brought in the latest field report, Samarin did not even read it.

"I know the situation without your report," he said indifferently. Turning to the cook he snapped:

"Do you think I'll be getting my dinner some time?"

"Dinner's ready, Comrade Major-General," replied the cook, clicking his heels and turning about so energetically that his white apron flapped. The mistress of the cottage, Olga Dimitrievna Gorbacheva, an old collective-farm woman, frowned disapprovingly. She was angry with the cook, who sneered at the village cooking and who had asked her:

"Tell me now, Dimitrievna, how would you set about preparing a côtelette de volaille, or, say, a potato pie, eh?"

"Oh, get along with you," she had replied. "Just imagine you teaching an old woman like me how to fry potatoes!"

"Goodness, I don't mean like in the country! I mean like I used to do them in the restaurant in Penza where I worked as cook before the war. Just suppose the Major-General asks you to prepare something like that, what'll you tell him, eh?"

It made her angry to think that she could not prepare dishes with stupid names and that that disgusting beanpole of a cook was more deft in the kitchen than she was.

"Timka, just suits you that name does—Timka," she said, knowing how the cook hated to be addressed so familiarly and how he grinned with pleasure when called formally "Timofei Markovich." Lyadov always addressed him like that, respectfully, when he wanted a bite before the Major-General had had his dinner.

Samarin was satisfied with his cook and was never cross with him. But this time when he sat down to eat he said to him irritably:

"How many times do I have to tell you to have the samovar brought here from Headquarters?"

"The Quartermaster's Department is bringing it this evening, Comrade Major-General."

"I suppose you've made roast mutton again?" grumbled Samarin. "I've told you twice already to fry some fish. The river's right at hand, and if I'm not mistaken there's plenty of time."

Dimitrievna snickered and staring at the discomfited cook said:

"All he knows is how to make fun of an old woman, and if a General asks for something, what's that to him! Timka, that's what you are!"

"Why, does he make fun of you?" asked Samarin.

"Doesn't he though! Now then, old lady, says he, can you fry a côtelette de volaille? And off he goes.... That Timka!"

Samarin smiled.

"Never mind," he said. "I can poke fun at him, too.... Cook, how do you make the batter for a sponge cake?"

"That's something I can't do, Comrade Major-General."

"Well, well. And how about dough made of wheat-flour? How does it rise, on soda or on yeast? Tell me that, if you please."

"I never worked in the bakery department, Comrade Major-General."

There was a general outburst of laughter at the disgraced cook's expense.

After dinner the General invited Olga Dimitrievna to have tea with him. The old woman slowly wiped her hands on her apron, and whisking away an invisible speck of dust from the stool sat down at the table. She drank her tea from the saucer, wiping her wrinkled forehead, which shone with perspiration.

"Help yourself to sugar, mother," said Samarin. "How's your grandson? Did he have a bad night again?"

"His foot's still festering. It's a regular misfortune, it is; he's exhausted himself and he's exhausted us."

"Cook, treat the boy to some jam."

"Yes, Comrade Major-General."

"How's it out in Ryakhovichi?" asked the old lady. "Is there fighting going on there?"

"Yes, they're fighting in Ryakhovichi," said Samarin.

"What the people are suffering!" exclaimed the old lady, crossing herself.

"No one's there," said Samarin. "The people have all gone. The

houses are empty. And the people took all their belongings with them."

At that moment a radiogram was brought in from Bogarev reporting the destruction of the tank column.

Lyadov knew the General's character well. He knew that before a trip to the most dangerous sectors of the front the General was always in a good mood, knew that the more tense and difficult the situation, the calmer Samarin became. He also knew a queer soft spot in this stern man. Whenever Samarin came into an abandoned cottage, where the cat, always true to its dwelling, had stayed on, he would take from his pocket a piece of bread that he always kept there for the purpose and call to the hungry cat; squatting down on his haunches he would feed it. Once he said thoughtfully to Lyadov:

"Know why village cats never play with white paper? They're not used to it. They always jump at dark paper; think it's a mouse."

And now, too, Lyadov knew that Samarin, after his conversation with the old woman and the receipt of the radiogram, was in a good humour again.

"Comrade Major-General," he said, "allow me to report. Major Mertsalov has come in answer to your call."

"What did you say?"

"I'm reporting, Comrade Major-General, that the Commander of the 111th Infantry Regiment has come in answer to your call."

"Oh, very good. Tell him to come in." Turning to Olga Dimitrievna, who had risen to go, he said: "Sit down, sit down, where are you going? Drink your tea. Please don't disturb yourself."

Mertsalov had come out onto the village road in the morning and joined his division. His march had not been a success. On the road he had lost part of his artillery, which had stuck fast in a marshy spot in the woods. The regimental transport had lost its way, as the column commander had not been given the correct route. Finally, the regiment had had to beat off an attack of German automatic-riflemen on the way, and Myshansky's company, which formed the rear guard, instead of forcing its way through to the main body, had wavered and together with its commander, who hesitated to proceed by way of the open field, had turned into the woods.

That morning Samarin had listened to Mertsalov's report and all he had asked was how much ammunition had been left with Bogarev.

"Report to me at seventeen hours," he had said.

Mertsalov knew that his interview with the General would be shorter than the first and boded him no good. Hence he was very much surprised and pleased when Samarin said to him:

"I'm going to give you a chance to make good your mistake. Establish contact with Bogarev, arrange with him on a concerted plan of action, make it possible for him to get out, and recover the guns that you have abandoned. Now you may go."

Mertsalov realized that the task that had been set him was extremely difficult. But he was not afraid of difficult and dangerous tasks. He was much more afraid of the wrath of his formidable chief.

THE MASTER OF THIS LAND

FOR TWO DAYS Bogarev and his battalion remained in the woods. There were not many men left in the battalion. The guns, camouflaged by branches, were trained on the road. Lieutenant Klenovkin of the artillery, a tall young man who had a tiresome habit of constantly glancing at his watch, was in command of the reconnaissance detachment. Most of the men in it were from the artillery; with them were three infantrymen, Ignatiev, Zhavelev and Rodimtsev.

Bogarev sent for Klenovkin.

"You'll not only have to be a scout," he said, "but quartermaster as well. Our bread supply is running low." He added thoughtfully: "We have medical supplies, but what can we give the wounded to eat? You see, they need special food—fruit jellies and cranberry juice."

Klenovkin, wanting to try out his new scouts, sent Rodimtsev and his comrades on their first reconnaissance.

"Yes," he said, "besides we have to see to it that the men get their bread, and the wounded have to have jelly and fruit drinks. The cook has potato starch for the jelly."

"But, Comrade Lieutenant," exclaimed Zhavelev in surprise, "what kind of jelly can there be here? Right in the middle of the forest, and with German tanks on the roads!"

Klenovkin smiled. His conversation with the Commissar had struck him, too, as being funny.

"It's all right, we'll look around. Come on, let's go," urged Ignatiev.

They made their way among the men who were lying under the

trees. One of them, with a bandaged arm, raised his pale face and said angrily:

"Can't you be quiet; what are you barging about for like a bear!"

Someone else whispered:

"You off for home, fellows?"

The scouts were soon deep in the woods. All the way Rodimtsev kept saying in a puzzled voice:

"It's simply amazing what's happened to the men! When they were fighting to hold our line, two hundred tanks didn't scare 'em, and here they've been lying around in the woods for two days and they've sort of gone off the deep end completely."

"They've got nothing to do," said Zhavelev. "It's always like that."

"I don't know, I just can't understand it," said Rodimtsev.

Before long they came to a road in the forest. For over two hours they lay in the roadside ditch. Past them sped German motorcyclists. One of them stopped quite close to the scouts, filling his pipe and lighting up before he rode on. Six heavy tanks rolled by, but the most frequent were trucks carrying supplies. The Germans talked among themselves as they sat there with their collars open at the throat as if they were sunning themselves. In one truck the soldiers were singing. Branches hung low over the road, and from almost every truck hands reached up to tear off a few leaves.

Then the scouts divided up. Rodimtsev and Zhavelev went through the woods to the spot where the forest road intersected the highway, while Ignatiev crossed the road and made his way along a ravine to the village in which the Germans were stationed.

He stood in the tall hemp and watched them for a long time. Tankmen and infantry were billeted in the village. They were evidently resting after having been transferred. Some of the men were bathing in the pond or lying about naked in the sun. In the orchard officers were dining under a tree; they were drinking and clinking their metal tumblers, which sparkled brightly in the sunlight. One of them was putting records on a gramophone. Another was playing with a dog, while a third, who was sitting a little way off, was writing. Soldiers were sitting on benches busily engaged in patching their underwear. Others had tied towels around their necks and were shaving. Still others were shaking the apple trees in the orchards and

knocking down the fruit from the top branches of pear trees with long poles. Some of the men were lying on the grass and reading newspapers.

The place reminded Ignatiev of his native village. The woods too were like the woods in which he used to wander for hours; the river was like the river where as a boy he had fished for gudgeon and slender little roach. The orchard in which the German officers were dining and playing the gramophone was very like Marusya Pesochina's orchard. How many wonderful hours he had spent with Marusya in the orchard. He recalled how the pale faces of the apples had gleamed amidst the sombre, black leaves at night, and how Marusya had laughed softly and sighed beside him, like a warm little bird. His heart grew hot with these memories....

A slim girl with bare feet and a white kerchief over her head appeared on the doorstep of the cottage. A German shouted something to her and pointed with his hand.... The girl turned back into the cottage and brought out a mug of water.

Excruciating pain, sorrow and rage scalded Ignatiev's heart. Never—neither on the night when the Germans had set fire to the city, nor in the devastated villages, nor at the height of the fiercest battle—had Ignatiev experienced such a feeling as he did on this bright, cloudless day. These Germans, calmly taking their ease in a Soviet village, were a thousand times more terrible than in battle.

Ignatiev crept through the woods, crouching low, speaking in a whisper, looking about stealthily, and yet he knew these leafy woods, their oaks, aspens, birch, maple, as he knew his own home. He had walked through just such a wood singing at the top of his voice the songs which crusty Granny Bogachikha had taught him. He had lain on crackling dry leaves and stared at the sky. He had watched the flitting of the birds, examined the mossy tree trunks. He knew all the best places for berries and mushrooms, knew where the foxes had their holes and in what hollows the squirrels nested, knew in what fields hares used to play among the tall grass just before evening. And now a German was lighting his pipe in the heart of this forest, and Ignatiev, mutely, cautiously, watched his every move from a ditch through the overhanging bushes. Black wire unreeled by German signalmen stretched past the lovely trees, and in child-like ignorance the rowans and birches permitted their slender branches to support it. And along this wire, through the Russian woods, German words sped. Where

there were no trees the Germans had brought young birches from the woods and buried their bodies in the earth, nailing signboards to them; and the dead birches stood there with their tiny yellow leaves like copper pennies, holding up this very same heinous German wire.

It was then that Ignatiev really understood what was happening to his country—that the people were fighting this war for the very breath of existence.

Ignatiev looked at these resting Germans and horror froze him to the marrow. For a moment he imagined that the war had ended. The Germans, just as they were doing now before his eyes, bathed, listened to the song of the nightingales of an evening, wandered through the woodland glades, picked raspberries, dewberries, mushrooms, drank tea in the cottages, played music under the apple trees, imperiously beckoned to girls and in that moment, Ignatiev, who had borne all the horrors of battle, who had so often crouched in a clay pit while German tanks had roared over his head, Ignatiev, who had tramped thousands of kilometres in the stifling dust of the roads at the front, who every day had seen death and gone to meet it, understood with all his heart that this war of today must go on until the Germans were driven from Soviet soil. The flames of conflagrations, the thunder of bursting bombs, battles in the air—all this was sweet in comparison with these fascists quietly resting in the Ukrainian village which they had occupied. This quiet, this complacency of the Germans made one's blood run cold. Ignatiev involuntarily patted the butt of his tommy gun and grasped a grenade in order to reassure himself of his strength, of his own readiness to fight. He, a rank-and-file soldier, was for the war with every fibre of his being.

This was not the war of 1914 about which his elder brother had told him, a war that the rank-and-file soldier had cursed and that had not been needed by the people.

All this Ignatiev felt with his soul, his mind, his heart on that bright, sunny day in the deceptive silence of noon as he watched the Germans resting.

"Yes, what the Commissar said to me that night was right," thought Ignatiev, recalling his conversation with Bogarev in the burning city.

He returned to the rendezvous and found his comrades waiting for him.

"What's doing on the dirt road?" he asked.

"Transports moving along it all the time," said Zhavelev in a dull tone, "transport after transport with geese and chickens cackling in the trucks; and they're driving off the cattle, too."

He looked upset, and his face no longer bore its habitual sly, rather jeering expression. It was plain that he, too, had felt savage sorrow at the sight of the German rear.

"What do you say, shall we be getting back?" asked Rodimtsev. He was as calm as ever. This was how his comrades knew him when they waited for the German tanks to come up; this was how they knew him during his business-like yet leisurely distribution of the bread ration before supper.

"We should nab a 'tongue,'" said Zhavelev.

"We could do that," said Ignatiev, brightening up. "I've already thought of a way." And he told his comrades his simple plan.

A thirst for action had seized on Ignatiev. He felt that he must fight day and night, that he must not lose a single minute. Had he not always been admired by the Tula gunsmiths for his skill and boundless capacity for work; had he not always been considered the best reaper in the village....

He reported to the Lieutenant on the results of his reconnaissance. The Lieutenant sent him to Bogarev, who was sitting under a tree.

"I say, Comrade Ignatiev," said Bogarev smiling, "where's your guitar? Is it still whole?"

"You bet it is, Comrade Commissar. Yesterday I played it to the men, but somehow they've got the blues bad; they're awfully quiet." Watching the Commissar's face closely he went on: "Comrade Commissar, give me a chance to do some real work, and you won't see me for dust; I can't bear to see the Germans playing their gramophones here and riding around in our woods."

"There's plenty to do," said Bogarev, "more than enough. Just now I'm concerned with feeding the wounded, getting a 'tongue'—that's plenty to be getting on with."

"Comrade Commissar," said Ignatiev, "if you'd give me five men I could attend to all that before evening."

"You're not just bragging, are you?" asked Bogarev.

"Let me have a crack at it and you'll see."

"I'll hold you to your word and punish you accordingly if you don't accomplish what you're undertaking."

"Very well, Comrade Commissar."

Bogarev gave orders to Klenovkin to choose a detail of volunteers. Fifteen minutes later Ignatiev was leading them through the woods towards the road.

The first job he had undertaken was soon done. He had already noticed several fields which were rosy with berries.

"Come on, girls," he shouted to the men, "tuck up your skirts and get going picking those berries!"

Everyone laughed at his jokes, laughed fit to kill as they listened to the stories which he told one after the other.

"Some berries," said Rodimtsev.

"Huckleberries separate, dewberries separate, raspberries separate, put leaves between the different kinds," ordered Ignatiev.

Forty minutes later the men's dixies and steel helmets were overflowing with berries.

"There you are, all very simple," explained Ignatiev in high feather to the men. "We'll stew the huckleberries for those who have stomach trouble, the raspberries for those who are feverish, and with the dewberries we'll make a sour juice like *kvas;* the wounded are always asking for something to drink."

Quickly and deftly he set to work squeezing the juice from the berries, and so that it should be clear strained it through a double layer of gauze from his first-aid kit. Soon he had several jars of clear thick juice. A common housefly appeared from somewhere. Ignatiev took the jars into the hut where the wounded lay. The old doctor looked at what Ignatiev had brought, choked, blinked and said:

"Even in the best hospital they could scarcely offer the wounded anything better than this. You have saved more than one life, Comrade Red Army man, sorry, I don't know your name."

Ignatiev stared at the doctor at a loss, coughed, hemmed and hawed, waved his hand and walked out. Beside him walked the joy of success.

The man who had been sent out to watch the forest road reported that a German truck had stalled there. Apparently there was some sort of serious engine trouble, as the Germans had talked for a long time and then all of them, including the driver, had gone off in a passing car.

"What's in the truck?" asked Ignatiev quickly.

"Haven't the slightest idea. It's covered over with a tarpaulin."

"Didn't you look?"

"How could I with cars popping this way and that all the time? You can't get near it."

"Oh, you and your popping!" exclaimed Ignatiev. "You sparrow!"

"Anyone can see that you're an eagle!" retorted the nettled scout.

Ignatiev went over to where the truck was standing and shouted: "Now, then, boys, this way."

The men gathered around him, their eyes fixed on his cheerful business-like face. He was the master of this woods, he and no other. Nor could anyone else be master. He spoke in a loud confident voice, as he did at home, and his bright eyes laughed.

"Hurry up, hurry up!" he shouted. "Grab the corners of this tarpaulin and hold on to 'em. That's right. The Germans have brought us some bread. You see how they rushed and sweated to get it to us while it was still nice and fresh. They even stalled the truck."

He threw loaf after loaf into the outspread tarpaulin, talking all the while:

"Fritz burned this one, he doesn't know how to bake bread in a field oven, we'll make him pay for that one. Now this one's good, you can see that Hans did his darndest. This one was on too long, Hermann must have fallen asleep over it. This here is a nice fluffy one, the best of the lot, Adolf himself baked it to order for me."

Beads of perspiration stood out on his bronzed forehead, and the sun, peering through the leaves, threw shadows on his face, on the bread flashing through the air, on the black sides of the German truck, on the green grass growing out into the road. Ignatiev straightened his back, spat, stretched, wiped his forehead and looked into the woods, at the sky, at the road, the sunlit fields.

"Like pitching hay, and me the foreman!" he said. "Well, boys, take that load a couple of hundred metres away, or maybe three hundred, dump it in the bushes and come back."

"You'd better dump yourself! What's the matter with you, gone nuts, or what? They'll be coming any minute!" they shouted to him.

"Where would I be going?" he asked in surprise. "This is my forest, I'm boss here. If I go people will be asking me: where you off to, boss?"

And he remained standing on the truck. Thrushes and jays screamed over his head, admiring his daring, his cheerfulness, his good nature. He crumbled up some bread and threw it to the birds, and then began to sing himself. But his eyes kept a keen watch on the

straight road along which he could see in either direction for a kilometre. Suddenly he stopped singing and listened intently, frowning. He thought he heard the sound of a motor. Away in the distance a cloud of dust appeared. Ignatiev peered into the cloud: a motorcycle!

"Now then, boss, why should you run?" he asked himself whimsically. Obviously they wouldn't be coming on a motorcycle to tow away or repair the truck. Ignatiev made sure of his grenade, gripped the handle and lay down in a corner from which the bread had already been removed. The motorcyclist sped past without even slowing down.

An hour later, the truck was completely empty. Before leaving, Ignatiev glanced into the driver's cab and pulled a cognac bottle out of the side door pocket. Very little had remained in it. Ignatiev thrust the bottle into his pocket. When the men had carried off the last load of bread the sound of an approaching car could be heard in the distance.

Ignatiev lay down in the bushes to see what would happen. The car slowed down, reversed, and drove up to the empty truck.

Ignatiev could not understand a word of what the Germans were shouting, but their gestures and the expressions on their faces were sufficiently clear. First of all they looked into the ditch and under the truck. Then the sergeant shouted something to the corporal while the latter stood with his hands stiffly at his sides and his heels pressed tightly together. It was quite clear to Ignatiev that the sergeant was yelling: "You son-of-a-bitch, couldn't you have put somebody on guard! What's there to be scared of?" and the corporal, with a woebegone expression on his face, made a sweeping motion with his hand as if to say: "With woods all around how could you make those bastards stay?" Then the sergeant apparently shouted: "You should have stayed yourself, you damned blockhead! I'll put you all in the guardroom for this." "It's up to you," replied the corporal and sighed. Then the corporal began to pitch into the driver. Ignatiev deciphered the ensuing hubbub as follows: "What the hell was the idea of stalling right in the middle of the woods, did you guzzle the whole bottle?" And the driver, seeing that the sergeant had gone off in answer to a call of nature, shouted back at the corporal: "What are you raising such a fuss for! God almighty, can't a person take a swig or two once in a while?"

The thrushes hopped about on the branches and mocked at the Germans. Then one of the men found a fag-end near the truck and

showed it to the sergeant. Ignatiev could see the sergeant looking at the charred scrap of newspaper from which the cigarette had been rolled, staring at the Russian letters.

"So that's who it was!" he shouted.

The Germans simply went crazy: they whisked out their Parabellums and some of the men unslung their tommy guns and opened fire at the trees. Leaves and twigs showered down onto the road. Ignatiev crept to the bushes where his comrades were waiting with the bread. Laughing, he told them what he had seen, and pulling the bottle from his pocket he said:

"No more than a thimbleful of this cognac left here, won't go round for the six of us in any case, so I guess I'll have to drink it myself, eh?"

And the ever meticulous Rodimtsev unscrewed the top of his flask and said:

"O.K., drink it yourself, here's a cup for you. I don't touch anything that's German."

Before evening Ignatiev brought a German to the Commissar. He captured him quite simply—he had severed the telephone line, dragged one end down the road and had lain in ambush with his comrades. An hour later two German signalmen came to look for the break in the wire. The Red Army men jumped out of the bushes. One of the Germans tried to run away and was shot; the second froze stock-still with surprise and was taken prisoner.

"I have a way of dealing with them in the woods, Comrade Commissar," said Ignatiev with brisk cheerfulness. "We can throw a motorcyclist by stretching a wire across the road. As for the infantry there's a very simple method: just tie up some chickens in the bushes and the Germans will come running for five kilometres around."

"Good idea," said Bogarev smiling.

Dusk had fallen when Rumyantsev ordered the infantry and gunners to fall in and read out to them an order commending the scout for his services. As he stepped out of the ranks at the command, Ignatiev replied:

"I serve the Soviet Union, Comrade Captain."

Mertsalov recalled his unsuccessful retreat with pain.

He had been overwhelmed by an unbearably humiliating feeling of helplessness during the brief march that had been more like flight

than the withdrawal of a regular army unit. It had been particularly distressing to watch the men under Myshansky. The men in his company had been utterly crushed, marching with their heads down, shuffling along wearily and in some cases without arms. Every loud sound made them start. They kept darting glances at the sky, and scattered as soon as a German plane so much as appeared on the horizon. Myshansky had forbidden them to open fire on aircraft and had ordered them to walk by the roadside, trying to pick out woods or places where the shrubbery was dense. The company marched in a disorderly, sprawling mob. Sensing their commander's lack of confidence, the men often failed to observe discipline. Several men from around Chernigov abandoned their arms at night and went off to their home towns. Mertsalov had given orders to arrest them, but they had not been found.

The advanced units of the regiment had come out onto the open field in the daytime. Some five to six kilometres in front of them loomed a forest which extended as far as the river. The Red Army men livened up—there, beyond the river, were our forces; there lay an end to the difficult and perilous route through the German rear. The horses, who scented water from afar, whinnied and the drivers had no need to spur them on. When the regiment had deployed and thousands of boots, the creaking wheels of baggage carts, the worn-out tires of motor vehicles, the broad tracks of the tractors were raising the dust on the road, a German reconnaissance plane appeared. It circled quickly over the dust-smoky road and flew off. Mertsalov realized that this meant he would soon encounter the enemy. He gave strict orders for the baggage carts and trucks to observe the twenty-metre interval as they moved along the road, in the event of an attack by bombers, and ordered AA machine guns mounted on trucks to be moved to the head and rear of the column. He was confident that the enemy would attack from the air.

Bitterly he had said to the Chief of Staff:

"Look at Myshansky's company, Comrade Major: all of them with their heads up, looking at the sky! And Myshansky himself is peering at the sky like an eagle! In the woods he shambles along as if he were seventy at least: he doesn't pick his head up there."

Mertsalov climbed the crest of a hill and looked around at the vast expanse of sky and earth stretching in front of him. The wheat

rippled and rustled as the wind stirred it and forced it low. The full yellow ears bowed, revealing the pale stalks. The whole field changed colour—from golden yellow to pale green. It was as if a deathly pallor spread over the wheat, as if its very life-blood were draining away, as if the field grew pale with horror at the departure of the Russian troops. And the wheat whispered, begged, bowed to the ground, then again raised its full ears, showing off all its rich, sun-bronzed beauty. Mertsalov gazed at the field, at the distant windmill, at the cottages gleaming in the tiny far-off village.

He looked at the sky—the milky blue, hot summer sky that he had known from childhood. Small, fleecy clouds were crossing it, so translucent that the blue of the sky shone through them. And this vast field, this vast sultry sky called out in their great sorrow, pleaded for help from the troops who were plodding through the dust along the hot road. And clouds kept moving from west to east, as if some invisible being were driving a huge flock of white sheep over the Russian sky that had been captured by the Germans. They moved in the wake of the troops who were going off in the dust, hurrying to reach a place where the sharp metal wings of German aircraft would not slash them. And the wheat whispered and bowed down to the very feet of the Red Army men, pled, and itself did not know what to ask for.

"Ekh, it's enough to make you weep blood," sighed Mertsalov, "salt blood, not tears."

A barefooted old woman with a half-empty knapsack slung over her bent back, and a round-eyed lad standing beside her stared in silence at the troops marching past through the dust, and indescribably awful was the reproach in their sad, fixed gaze—the old woman's eyes, child-like in their helplessness, and the youngster's with the weariness of the aged. They stood there, lost in the vast field.

It was a bitter day. Never would Mertsalov forget it. He had expected the enemy from the air, but they had attacked on land. In the brief encounter, Mertsalov had lost his transport and Myshansky's company, which had gone off into the woods together with its commander.

The regiment reached the river towards evening. The painful trek had ended. But the Regimental Commander did not rejoice. Bitter thoughts assailed him.

The Chief of Staff walked over to Mertsalov and gave him the report of the Political Officer of No. 2 Company. A Red Army man had remained in a cabin in the woods, declaring to his comrades that he had decided to bide over these troublous times with the young widow who lived there. Mertsalov gave orders for a light truck to be sent immediately to fetch the deserter. He was brought to Regimental Headquarters at night, wearing peasant dress and bast sandals. He had tied a stone to his uniform and dropped it into a stream. Mertsalov stood aside and listened to the conversation that followed between him and the Red Army men.

"And d'you mean to say you sunk your forage cap with the Red Star?" asked gunner No. 1.

"Uh-huh," grunted the deserter morosely and indifferently.

"And your rifle?" asked gunner No. 2.

"What would I be wanting it for? I was staying in the cabin."

"He drowned his soul in that stream, too," said Glushkov, a tall, gloomy-looking Red Army man whose brother had been killed in the battle with the German tanks. "He tied a brick to it and sent it to the bottom."

"Why should I drown my soul?" asked the deserter in an offended tone of voice, and scratched his leg.

The Sergeant-Major who had gone to fetch the deserter said with a sneer:

"When we came he'd already gone to bed with his young widow—everything spread out just so, an empty half pint on the table, two wine glasses, and they'd been eating roast pork."

"Ought to take her, too, and shoot the pair of them," said gunner No. 1.

"Step on them," said a thin private with a haggard face and sick, feverish eyes.

Mertsalov walked over to the deserter. He recalled the whole bitter day, the wheat, the sky, the old woman and the boy whose eyes had reproached the retreating troops, and for the first time in his life he uttered the weighty, formidable words:

"I sentence you to be shot before the troops drawn up on parade."

That night Mertsalov did not sleep. "No, I shan't give way," he thought. "I have the strength within me for this war."

THE COMMISSAR

MYSHANSKY showed up at Bogarev's forest Headquarters in the morning.

"Good morning, Comrade Commissar," he said jauntily. "And so we meet again!"

The men with him were unshaven and their tunics were in tatters. Myshansky himself did not look much better than his men. He had ripped the badges of rank from his collar, and the hook and top buttons of his tunic had been wrenched off. He had neither despatch case nor map case. Evidently he had discarded them so that he would not look like a commander. He had even taken his revolver from the holster and thrust it into the pocket of his breeches.

Sitting down beside Bogarev, he said softly:

"Yes, we've certainly landed smack into a classic encirclement, Comrade Commissar, you and I. In my opinion the only thing to do would be to let the men scatter and make our way individually through the enemy's line."

Listening to him Bogarev felt the blood drain from his face and it seemed to him that his cheeks had even grown cold and pale with rage.

"Why are your men in such a state?" he asked quietly.

Myshansky waved his hand.

"Why ask?" he answered. "You won't find any heroes among them. We came out into the open field at night and when the Germans began to send up rockets the men fell as flat as if they were being bombarded."

Bogarev stood up and shifted his weight heavily from one foot to the other. Myshansky continued to sit on the grass, unaware of Bogarev's rage-distorted face.

"I say, Comrade Commissar," he said, "have you got a smoke? Yes, I think that the way I suggest is correct—to make our way across the front singly. Every man for himself. In any case we'll never break through in a crowd."

"Get up!" said Bogarev.

"What?" asked Myshansky.

"Get up!" repeated Bogarev loudly and authoritatively.

Myshansky looked Bogarev in the face, and sprang to his feet.

"Stand to attention!" said Bogarev, and with fury in his eyes he shouted: "What do you think you look like? Is this how you report to a senior officer? Get yourself and your men in presentable shape immediately, and see to it that not a single man is unshaven, not a single tunic torn. Get your badges where they belong. In twenty minutes fall your company in and report to me, commander of a regular unit of the Red Army operating in the enemy rear, to whom you are subordinate."

"Yes, Comrade Battalion Commissar," said Myshansky, and still thinking that the matter was not a serious one smiled and added: "Only where shall I get the badges? Here we are, surrounded in the woods, I can't very well be sewing acorns onto my collar."

Bogarev looked at his watch and said slowly:

"Within twenty minutes, if my orders are not carried out you will be shot before the troops, under that tree."

Only then did Myshansky realize and sense the unwavering, indomitable strength of the man who was talking to him.

Meanwhile the gunners and infantry were questioning the newly arrived men.

"Hey there, whiskers," Morozov, hero of the battle with the German tanks, shouted to one of them, "what year are you?"

"Nineteen-twelve," came the whispered reply, and raising his finger the man said warningly: "You better talk more quietly, mates."

"Why is that, old man?" asked Ignatiev purposely raising his voice.

"Qui-i-et," begged the unshaven private. "Can't you hear?"

"Hear what?" asked the scouts and the gunners with interest.

"Why, there are Germans all around, you can hear them talk."

All the men looked around in amazement, while Ignatiev suddenly burst out laughing so loudly that several of the men from Myshansky's company began to hiss at him: "Shut up, shut up!"

"What the hell's the matter with you, boys!" exclaimed Ignatiev. "Are you crazy—those are crows cawing, crows, I tell you!"

And the friendly laughter spread through the woods; the gunners laughed, the infantrymen laughed, the scouts laughed, the wounded laughed, gasping with pain, and even the newcomers laughed, shaking their heads and spitting in embarrassment.

Just then Myshansky came up to them.

"Step lively, now!" he shouted. "I give you fifteen minutes to

shave and to get yourselves in full trim. Comrades platoon leaders, sergeants, put on your badges of rank and fall the company in."

He snatched up his field pack and ran down to the river.

Bogarev walked under the trees, thinking:

"There are no heroes in the company, Myshansky says. Let's say, there aren't. What of it? If there are no heroes, we'll make them. There'll be heroes. I'm sure of that!"

The company soon fell in. Captain Rumyantsev slowly inspected the men, closely scrutinizing their uniforms, examining the rifles and passing sarcastic remarks about every trifling omission.

"Pull your belt tighter," he snapped. "Tighter. Call that a clean shave? You've got to take pains with your shaving, and not just scrape your face any old way.... And you there! You didn't clean your rifle. That won't do at all. Do you think a soldier in the Red Army can treat his gun in that slovenly way?..."

One would have thought that this was an inspection in a military school and not in the woods in the German rear.

Bogarev had purposely asked Rumyantsev to subject the men to a scrupulous inspection. He himself watched the company from a distance.

Rumyantsev walked along to the left flank, glaring at the ranks with a critical eye.

"Comrade Lieutenant," he said to a platoon commander, "your men are not arranged according to height."

Bogarev stepped forward.

"Attention!" shouted Myshansky, and stepping in front of the ranks reported loudly.

Bogarev passed along the ranks and then addressed the men. He spoke without raising his voice, but his every word reached the listeners. He spoke of the great hardships of the war, of the bitter retreat. He told them how complicated and perilous the situation was, hiding nothing from them. He spoke about the German tanks, about barred roads, gave them his estimation of the enemy's strength on this sector. He spoke of the life and death battle that the people were waging.

And the men in the ranks listened to him, their shoulders squared, their faces calm, gazing at the Commissar with the wise eyes of people whom it is not necessary to teach.

During those difficult hours and days, the men wanted to hear the truth, hard and cheerless as it was. And Bogarev told them this

truth. A cold wind, harbinger of the autumn, whistled among the high leaves of the trees. And after the sultriness, after the black menacing nights of these months, after the breathless noons and evenings filled with the buzzing of mosquitoes, this wind coming from the north brought memories of winter, snow, blizzards, and was inexpressibly welcome. This wind said that the difficult, stifling summer was drawing to a close and that a new period was coming. The men somehow felt this with their whole being, and linked up this new feeling with the words of their Commissar and with the gust of cold wind which made the oaks rustle as in November.

Bogarev stayed awake that night. He strolled over to a sandy hillock where pines were growing and lay down, covering himself with his greatcoat. It was quite cool. The moon moved slowly across the blue sky between the black trunks. The smooth sailing of the moon was particularly noticable in the woods, among the trees. It was so huge that even the thickest trunks did not hide it, and the yellow rim, vanishing from one side of the trunk, grew and spread on the other. Bogarev was smoking, and the transparent smoke of his cigarette looked like glass in the light of the moon. The sky was vast and deserted—the moon had eclipsed the stars. Over the leafy part of the forest a bluish haze hung, light as cigarette smoke. And under the pines was a constant murmur, as if thousands of ants were working at night—dewdrops sliding to the ground from the slippery pine needles. The dew collected, gathering on the sharp green needles and slipping down their smooth sides. The full drops gleamed in the moonlight. So beautiful was the night that sadness enveloped Bogarev. The soft murmur of the falling drops, the smooth drift of the moon, the shadows of the tree trunks, moving imponderably and slowly over the ground, spoke of the wise beauty of a world plunged in thought.

And the world shuddered at the blows of the war. The war crept under the ploughed soil, hid beneath the waters, rose ten thousand metres over the earth, stormed in the woods, on the fields, over quiet ponds overgrown with duckweed, over rivers and towns, knowing neither day nor night. And Bogarev thought: if Hitler should win in this war, there would be no sun for the world, no stars or beautiful nights like this.

He caught sight of a man sitting in a moonlit glade and called out to him. It was Ignatiev.

"What are you doing here, Comrade Ignatiev?" he asked.

"I can't sleep, Comrade Commissar, such a night!"

Bogarev liked this strong, cheerful man. He had noticed the influence that Ignatiev had over the Red Army men. He had heard the men repeating Ignatiev's jokes and telling about his cheerful, shrewd courage. Wherever Ignatiev was sitting there was always a group of five or ten men.

"What are you thinking of, Comrade Ignatiev?" asked Bogarev.

"I was recalling my buddy, Sedov. When the war started the nights were also moonlit. Once he said to me: 'What a night, Ignatiev, and yet how much longer I shall be on this earth, I don't know.' And now he's gone."

"And Babadjanyan's gone too," said Bogarev, and sighed.

Bogarev began to talk and Ignatiev found himself listening with interest. He had never cared for speeches with all sorts of explanations. "What's there to teach me," he thought, "I know everything myself." He himself was rarely the one to listen, he usually got others to listen to him. He knew all sorts of tales, anecdotes and reminiscences that he had gathered from veteran soldiers, old men and women. He had a passion for collecting such stories. He remembered them easily, for his memory was exceptionally good, and since he also had a very lively imagination he would retell them in his own way and relate to his comrades ingenious stories about the Red Army men against whom Hitler had taken it into his head to fight, stories that were at the same time amusing and horrible. But on this night the Commissar spoke and Ignatiev listened. And he did not forget a single word of the conversation.

"It's a fact, Comrade Commissar," he said, "it's as if I've become a different man in this war. You walk along and you get to feel so sorry for every river, every bit of woodland that your heart aches. Yet life wasn't always easy for the people, but then the hardships were their own, ours. The land was ours, the factories ours, the life ours. It wasn't an easy life, but it was ours. How can we possibly give it up? Lately I've begun to do a lot of thinking. When I was called up I thought to myself—hell, there's nothing to it. But now I'm just burning up. Today I was walking along a glade and there a tree was rustling and trembling. It suddenly hurt me so that I felt as if something was tearing at me. Can it really be that this little tree will go to the Germans, I thought? No, I tell the fellows, that'll never happen. A pal of mine, Rodimtsev, says: whatever the cost,

we've got to stand fast; we're fighting for our own land. Whatever it was—even when there wasn't enough to eat—it was my own life, it belonged to me."

The light of the moon faded and dark clouds covered the sky. Soon a fine rain, like cold dust, began to fall.

Bogarev turned up the collar of his greatcoat, coughed and said in his usual unhurried, muffled voice:

"Comrade Ignatiev, the reconnaissance was given orders to smash a German transport. A new detachment is going on this mission and the most unreliable men in Myshansky's company have been picked for it. They must be taught and their morale improved. I appoint you to this detachment. Let them see how the Germans can be thrashed."

"Yes, Comrade Commissar," replied Ignatiev.

"So this is the end of the moonlit night," thought Bogarev. And so too thought Ignatiev as he left the Commissar.

Soon after, Bogarev woke Myshansky.

"In an hour's time you are to leave with a detachment to raid a German transport."

"From whom do I get my instructions?" asked Myshansky.

"Lieutenant Klenovkin is the commander of the detachment, and he has instructions. You will go on this operation as a private with a rifle. From today on you are no longer in command of the company."

"Comrade Commissar!" exclaimed Myshansky. "Allow me to explain!"

"Let me give you a word of warning," interrupted Bogarev. "Don't be afraid of the Germans, be afraid of showing irresolution. No explanations are required and there will be none in the future, bear that in mind."

LENYA

THROUGH GERMAN-occupied villages Vassili Karpovich trudged together with Lenya Cherednichenko. It was the sixth day of their wanderings. The lad was drooping and footsore. He asked the old man:

"Why is blood coming from my feet? We've been walking on a soft road all the way."

They ate well. The village women gave them as much milk, bread and bacon as they could hold. One night they stopped at a cottage where a woman lived with her two daughters. The girls had been in their last year of high school, had studied algebra and geometry, and knew a little French. The mother had dressed her daughters in rags; their hands and faces were grimy, their hair uncombed and tangled. The reason for all this was to keep the Germans from molesting the two pretty girls. They kept looking at themselves in the mirror and bursting out laughing.

It seemed to them that in a day or two this crazy, topsy-turvy life would come to an end, that the village elder would give them back the geometry, physics and French textbooks that he had taken away from them by order of the German commandant, that the Germans would no longer drive them to work. Rumours were current that crowds of women and girls were being marched along the roads to work in distant camps, that the pretty ones were singled out and disappeared without a trace, that the women and the men were kept apart in the camps, that weddings were being forbidden in all Ukrainian villages. The girls listened to all this but in their heart of hearts they did not believe it. It all seemed too savage.

They had been getting ready to go to Glukhov in the autumn to enter the teachers' training school there. They read a great deal, were able to solve quadratic equations with two unknowns, knew that the sun was really a star which was cooling and that the temperature of its surface was approximately six thousand degrees centigrade. They had read *Anna Karenina*, and during examinations in literature had written essays on the "Lyrics of Lermontov" and "A Character Study of Tatyana Larina." Their father had been in charge of the farm laboratory and had corresponded with Academician Lysenko in Moscow. Giggling, the girls looked down at the rags in which they were dressed and comforted their mother:

"Don't cry, Mum, it can't last. Adolf will come to a bad end just as Napoleon did."

When they heard that Lenya had been attending a Kiev school and was in the third grade, they gave him a test, problems in multiplication and division. They kept speaking in whispers and glancing out of the window. It seemed that with Germans in the village children were not allowed to speak about arithmetic. And one of the girls, brown-eyed Pasha, took the paper on which Lenya had solved

the problems, tore it into tiny shreds and threw them into the stove.

They made a bed for Lenya on the floor. Despite his exhaustion, he could not fall asleep. The talk about school had upset him. It brought back memories of Kiev, the room with the toys, his father teaching him to play chess, and how they would sometimes play together of an evening. Lenya would frown, wrinkle up his nose and stroke his chin in imitation of his father. His father would laugh and say: check-mate. And alongside these recollections others rose—memories of the fire, of the dead girl they had seen in the field, of the gallows on the square in a Jewish settlement, of the roaring of aeroplane motors. They interfered with one another, these recollections.

Sometimes it seemed to him that there had never been a school or comrades or matinees at the movies. At others it seemed to him that his father would come to his bed at any moment and stroke his hair, and a feeling of peace and happiness flooded his small weary, body.

To Lenya, his father was a great man. With the unerring instinct of childhood he sensed his father's spiritual strength. He had noticed the respect with which his father's military comrades treated him, had noticed how when they were all seated at the table they would stop talking and turn their heads when the quiet, slow voice of his father spoke. And this eleven-year-old lad, helpless, wandering blindly through burning villages hemmed in by advancing forces of the German army, did not for a second waver in his thoughts—his father was just as strong, just as wise as he had known him to be in the days of peace. And when he walked through the fields, when he fell asleep in the woods, or in some haystack, he was certain that his father would come to meet him, that his father was looking for him.

At last he fell asleep to the sound of Vassili Karpovich's low voice talking to the mistress of the house.

"We passed through forty villages," said the old man, "and we've seen an order the likes of which we never want to see again. And there were some among us who waited and thought: there'll be order on the land. In one village they made them keep records of the milking: twice a day soldiers come and take away the milk. As if the cows had been hired out to the collective farmers. But the cows belong to the collective farmers. In another village all the men were ordered to give up their boots. You collective farmers must go bare-

foot. They appointed village elders everywhere. And these elders simply take it out of the people, but they themselves are not the bosses, and they themselves can't sleep nights they're so scared of the Germans themselves. Whatever you do it's no good. Do it one way it's no good, do it the opposite way it's also no good. 'As for the land,' the German says, 'forget it.' In all the villages I've been through, I didn't hear a single cock crow. They've wrung the necks of every last one.

"There was an old man they shot. He was always climbing on the roof and looking in the direction of the sunrise to see whether our people were coming. And the Germans shot him. It seems you mustn't look at the sunrise. They've hung up signboards everywhere, but as to what's written on them no one knows. There are arrows and arrows all over the place, pointing. And the women complain—day and night they have to keep the stoves going, cooking and baking. And they keep chattering and chattering all the time. The women are simply furious. You can't understand a word they say, and all the time they keep babbling away like fools: 'Matka, matka.' They're not ashamed in front of the old women, walk around naked right under their eyes. There's no keeping the cats in the houses on account of them, say the women. One old lady told me that it's something terrible if a cat goes out of the house; cats won't stay in the house where they are. Usually you can't get a cat out of the house with fire or water and yet here they themselves go off into the back yard. Wherever I turn I see what looks like order, but it's nothing of the sort, it's death for us. Brother is afraid to look at brother.

"In one village they gathered together all the men and explained to them in Ukrainian: 'Who was it,' they say, 'that oppressed you—the Russians, the Jews, that's who the enemies of the Ukraine are,' they say. And the old men stood around without saying a word, but on their way back they said: 'We've heard that story before about how everyone plays us dirty and only the Germans have come to do what's good.'

"In one village they rounded up the men to make a toilet for a general and drove them for forty versts to bring bricks so as to make it just so. One old man told me: 'I don't care if they choke me but I'm not going to do a job like that again.' People go around whispering, afraid to look each other in the eye, there's no friendliness at all. They treat the people like cattle. First they register everybody, the

next minute they re-register them, then they grade them and drive them all out. Soon they'll be branding them and hanging little tallies with numbers round their necks. . . ."

Lenya woke up with a start.

"Granddad," he said, "it must be time for us to go."

The old man did not answer. Lenya threw a quick glance around the room. Vassili Karpovich was not there. His knapsack lay on the bench.

"Where's granddad?" asked the boy.

The old lady was sitting at the window and gazing at her sleeping daughters while the tears ran down her cheeks.

"They took him away, those fiends, took him away in the night," she said. "Today they took the old man away, tomorrow they'll take away my daughters. We are lost, lost."

Lenya jumped up.

"Who took him away, where did they take him to?" he asked with a sob.

"As to who took him, it's clear," said the old woman, and began to curse the Germans savagely: "May their eyes pop out, may they never live to see their children again, may the cholera choke them all, may their hands and legs wither!" Then she said: "Don't cry, sonny, we won't chase you out. Stay with us, we'll take care of you."

"No, I don't want to stay," said Lenya.

"But where will you go?"

"I'm going to my Dad."

"Now you just wait a bit. The samovar will soon boil and you'll have a bite with us and then we'll talk over where you have to go."

Lenya was suddenly afraid that the woman would not let him go. He rose softly, and stole to the door.

"Where are you going?" asked the old woman.

"I'll only be a minute," he replied. He walked out into the yard, glanced quickly back at the door, and began to run at full speed.

He ran down the village street, past black seven-ton trucks, their high sides reaching to the thatched roofs, past a field kitchen where the cook was lighting the fire, past the Red Army prisoners of war with their ash-grey faces, sitting barefoot in bloodstained, filthy underwear behind the collective-farm stable. He ran past yellow arrow signposts with figures and black Gothic letters on them. Everything grew confused in his head and it seemed to him that he was running away from the old woman and her daughters, who had solved the arithmetic

problems with him. The old woman would heat the samovar and make him drink tea in the lonesome, bolted cottage from morning to night.

He ran as far as the windmill and then stopped. Here the road branched off—one yellow arrow pointed in the direction of the village, another towards a wide road with the tracks of many cars and tanks showing plainly. Lenya took the narrow path through the fields—there was no German arrow pointing down this path—towards the sombre woods in the distance. It was a long time since anyone had travelled along this road. It looked as if the last time anyone had passed along it was in the spring when the wheels of the peasant carts had left deep ruts in the now stony clay soil.

An hour later Lenya reached the outskirts of the forest. He was hungry and thirsty and the sun beat down on him mercilessly. Fear seized him in the woods. At one time it seemed to him that the Germans were watching him from behind the trees, crawling out of the bushes. Then he fancied that there were wolves and great black boars from the zoo with long tusks and snarling lips coming after him. He wanted to shout, to call for help, but he was afraid of giving himself away and walked along in silence. At times his fear and despair became so unbearable that he cried out and took to his heels. He ran blindly, paying no attention to the path, until he was breathless. Then he sat down, rested a bit and went on again. At other moments he would be filled with joyful confidence—it seemed to him that his father was walking along with his big, easy stride, peering into the thicket and all the time coming closer and closer to him.

In a clearing he found some berries. Then he remembered a book he had read about bears who liked to wander through glades gathering raspberries, and so he hurried into the woods again.

Suddenly he saw a man among the trees. He stopped short, pressing up against a thick tree trunk and peering intently ahead. A man with a gun was standing there and looking in the direction where the boy had hidden. Evidently he had heard the sound of footsteps. Lenya stared and stared, but a heavy shadow prevented him from getting a clear sight of the man. Suddenly a joyful, penetrating cry came from among the trees. The Red Army man raised his rifle, but the boy ran straight up to him shouting;

"Comrade ... comrade ... don't shoot, it's me, me!" He ran straight up to the Red Army man, and weeping seized his tunic, holding on so tightly that his fingers went white.

The Red Army man stroked his hair, and shaking his head said:

"Where did you bruise your feet like that? Why, they're bleeding.... Don't hold on to me like that, I won't chase you away into the woods." He sighed and added: "Maybe my own boy is wandering about through the woods like this too. Yes, the Germans can kill me twice over, but I won't rest in the earth so long as they're boss here."

Lenya was soon lying on a bed of leaves, having eaten and drunk his fill. His feet were bandaged. Around his waist was a Red Army belt with a real leather holster, and in the holster was his toy pistol. All around him sat Red Army commanders and he was telling them about the Germans he had seen in the villages.

Bogarev came up and they all rose to their feet.

"Well, how goes it?" asked Bogarev. "I suppose you'll be seeing your Dad soon, tomorrow, most likely. And you, comrades, mind you let this little traveller rest."

"No, I don't want to rest at all," said the boy. "I'm going to play chess with the Captain now."

"Well, Comrade Rumyantsev, you've found yourself a new partner, have you?" asked Bogarev smiling.

"Yes, we're going to play a game," said Rumyantsev.

They set up the pieces and Rumyantsev fixed his eyes on the board, frowning. Several long minutes passed like this.

"Why don't you move?" asked the boy.

Rumyantsev suddenly stood up, abruptly threw out his hand and quickly walked off towards the woods.

"Don't be offended, lad," said a sergeant who was standing nearby. "He's just remembered his Commissar. They always used to play chess together."

Meanwhile Rumyantsev was walking along blindly, without turning his head, and whispering to himself:

"Never to play another game together, Seryozha, never another game together...."

THE BATTALION WILL ATTACK IN THE MORNING

IT SEEMED as though the camp in the woods was idle. Yet Bogarev had probably never felt so tired as he did during those days when they were preparing to break through the German lines. He hardly slept at night; his thoughts and his will power were at high tension. And

this tension was communicated to everybody—commanders and men. Bogarev talked to the men; the commanders drilled them. Telephone communication was established between units of the battalion, and every morning the radio operator took down the communiqués of the Soviet Information Bureau. They were typed in several copies and a despatch rider on a motorcycle captured from the Germans distributed them among the troops in the woods. Every morning a few small detachments went out on reconnaissance, followed up the Germans and gathered information concerning the movement of troops and transport columns.

The troops' equipment was repaired, and an unusually strict discipline established. Penalties were meted out for failure to salute, reports were received with all due formality, and the slightest infringements of discipline met with punishment. Inexperienced and gun-shy soldiers were trained to meet danger—they were sent out to ambush German despatch riders, to capture enemy signallers and to destroy lone motor vehicles. The first time they were accompanied by experienced scouts; after that they were ordered out alone, to act on their own initiative and at their own risk.

In the evening Bogarev addressed the commanders on the course of the war, and his confidence in victory, a confidence that sprang from a grim knowledge of the tremendous burdens of the first months of the war, convinced the men.

"What gets me," said Rumyantsev, "is the way the Germans keep insisting that it's a *blitzkrieg*, and the silly time limits—thirty-five days for taking Moscow, seventy days to finish the war. And every morning when we get up we can't help but count—here it's already fifty days we've been fighting, now sixty-one, then sixty-two, and to date seventy-one. And most likely they're saying among themselves: well, what of it, if it won't be seventy it'll be a hundred and seventy—fat lot of difference that makes. After all we're not fighting about the calendar."

"That's the very thing that is at issue," said Bogarev. "The experience of almost all the wars that Germany has waged has shown that she can't win a long-drawn-out war. You've only to look at the map to see why the Germans talk about a *blitzkrieg*. A lightning-fast war means winning the war for them. A protracted war spells defeat for them."

Then Bogarev glanced around at the commanders and said:

"Comrades, the man who has gone through the frontline to Army Headquarters should return today. I think we shall attack tomorrow."

Bogarev remained with Rumyantsev. They lay down side by side on the grass and began to study the map. The reconnaissance which had been going on day and night had brought them much information and Rumyantsev unerringly hit on the weak spot in the German line of defence.

"Here," said Rumyantsev, "we can advance through the woods; it's a good place for us to concentrate; we continue on through the woods all the way to the river. In general I believe that if we move only at night, we can get as far as our bank without firing a shot; we'll cross right over without being seen."

"Well, well, well!" said Bogarev. "How can you, Comrade Rumyantsev, an excellent Soviet commander, an experienced and intelligent gunner, talk such nonsense!"

"What?" exclaimed the astonished Rumyantsev. "What nonsense? I assure you that we can get across at night without being seen. The enemy is weakest at that point. After all, I went out there myself and saw with my own eyes."

"Yes, that's just it, that's just where the nonsense comes in!"

"How's that, Comrade Commissar?"

"Why, damn it all, man! A regular unit is operating behind the enemy's line and you suggest that it creep through in the night without firing a shot. Let such a wonderful opportunity pass? I should say not! We're not going to look for the place where the Germans are weakest. We're going to find out where they've concentrated the largest quantities of war material, deal them a blow from the rear, smash them and come out victorious, having inflicted heavy losses on them. How can we do otherwise?"

Rumyantsev gazed long and intently at Bogarev.

"Forgive me," he said at last. "By God! What you say is quite true; we can punch out and not just creep through."

"It's nothing, nothing at all," said Bogarev thoughtfully. "The instinct of self-preservation often plays tricks on people in wartime. We must always bear in mind that we're here for a life and death struggle, that trenches are dug to shoot from and not to hide in, that it is necessary to crawl into a shelter trench in order to save one's life for the grim attack that will take place an hour later. Yet there comes a moment when people begin to think that a dugout is a place to hide

in and nothing more.... This philosophical idea can be expressed quite simply," he added. "We're behind the enemy's line so that we may fall on him suddenly and not so that we may hide in the woods. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, you're quite right."

Lieutenant Klenovkin came up to Bogarev.

"Comrade Commissar," he said, and glanced at his watch by sheer force of habit, "a guest has arrived."

"Who is it?" asked Bogarev. Then he caught sight of the face of the man standing beside Klenovkin, and shouted joyfully: "Why, it's Kozlov, our famous reconnaissance company commander!"

"Senior Lieutenant Kozlov, just arrived and reporting to you under orders of Major Mertsalov, Commander of the 111th Regiment," Kozlov reported loudly and with exaggerated meticulousness, his intelligent brown eyes smiling just as they did on the first day of their acquaintance.

"Didn't so much arrive, as crawl in on my belly," he said to Rumyantsev in an undertone.

Kozlov sat down beside Bogarev. He gave him the details of the plan for a joint attack which had been worked out by Mertsalov. Point by point he outlined the whole intricate operation. Both the time of concentration and attack, and the system of signals for co-ordinating operations had been planned in great detail. He described the place where our tanks would go into action, and the place from which the artillery and mortars would operate; told them how the road along which the Germans would try to bring up their reserves would be cut off, and how the divisional artillery would hold the Germans' possible line of retreat under fire. He handed Bogarev a gold watch and said:

"Comrade Mertsalov asked me to give you his watch, he has a nickel one as well, and they have been synchronized to a second."

Bogarev took the watch and turned it over in his hand. Comparing it with his wrist watch he saw that his own was four minutes slow.

"Fine," he said. He smiled as he thought to himself: "Maybe there was no need to say all those unpleasant things to Mertsalov. And yet who knows?" "You will take over the command of our rifle battalion," he said turning to Kozlov. "And you, Comrade Rumyantsev, as soon as it begins to get dark will have to get moving; that's no easy road for heavy guns through the woods."

"The road is ready, cleared and in some places strengthened with brushwood," answered Rumyantsev, who always had everything ready beforehand.

"Very good. There's only one shortcoming—I've got nothing to smoke. You don't happen to have a cigarette on you, Comrade Kozlov?"

"But I don't smoke, Comrade Commissar," answered Kozlov in a guilty voice. "You would hang me if you'd heard how Mertsalov tried to persuade me to take a couple of boxes of cigarettes along and I refused, saying: 'They have tobacco, they have plenty.'"

"Oh, you!" muttered Rumyantsev wrathfully. "And here we're smoking clover."

"Yes, you certainly did us a good turn," said Bogarev. "And what brand were the cigarettes Mertsalov offered you?"

"The box was blue and it had white mountains and a horseman on it, 'Kazbek' or something."

"Of course, 'Kazbek.' How do you like that, Comrade Rumyantsev?"

"Clear enough we have no luck," said Rumyantsev laughing. "You're most likely the only reconnaissance officer in the army who doesn't smoke. And an evil fate had to go and link us up with you."

"Well, comrades, you had better get moving, there's lots to be done," said Bogarev.

Kozlov walked off a few steps with Rumyantsev and then asked softly:

"What's this about Myshansky?"

Rumyantsev told him.

"It's a funny business," said Kozlov thoughtfully. "I've known Myshansky a long time, knew him before the war. He was a plain worker, and yet he was never liked on account of his official optimism. He'd shout 'Hurrah!' and that would be the end of it. He was always yelling about how we'd just mop up all our enemies. And then came the test—and what a foul ball he turned out to be."

"It's clear enough," Rumyantsev answered him, "his optimism was put on. As our Commissar says, he has changed into his antithesis."

"And how do you find the Commissar?" asked Kozlov.

"Oh, the Commissar, he's tough," said Rumyantsev, and sighed: "But my old pal, Seryozha Nevtulov, he's gone, killed."

"I know," said Kozlov, "he was a good lad, Nevtulov was. He's done for, poor devil."

Shortly afterwards the men were informed of the night attack. They began to assemble. As is always the case when some serious business is about to begin, the men's faces took on a thoughtful, preoccupied look. In the semi-twilight under the shadow of the trees at sunset their faces seemed particularly dark, drawn, mature.

To the men this wood was like a familiar tenanted house—the trunks of the trees under which they had held so many long conversations, the hollows overgrown with moss where they had slept so comfortably, the creaking of the dry branches and the rustling of the leaves, the cries of the sentries standing in the underbrush behind the hazel bush, the raspberry patches and the spots where mushrooms grew, the tapping of the woodpecker and the call of the cuckoos. In the morning they would no longer be in that wood. And many of them would meet their death and the rising sun in the open field.

"Here you are, take my tobacco pouch for tomorrow, and if I'm done for, keep it. It's a pity to lose such a good one," said one man to another. "It's rubber, you know, holds a packet and a half of tobacco, waterproof, damp won't hurt it."

"I might get killed as well," said the other in a hurt voice.

"But you're a stretcher-bearer, and I have to go first. There's more chance of my being bumped off."

"All right, hand it over, it'll be something to remember you by."

"Only don't forget, if I come out alive I want it back, I'm giving it to you in front of witnesses."

Everyone standing around smiled.

"Ekh, what wouldn't I give for a smoke," said several voices all at once.

Bogarev walked around among the groups of men, listened to their conversation, then walked on and listened to others.

And a calm, austere consciousness of the strength of the people, who were determined to fight to the death, flooded him.

The rays of the setting sun slanting between the tree trunks lit up for a moment the sunburned faces of the men, the black barrels of their rifles, played on the brass cartridges which the Sergeant-Major was handing out, lit up the white bandages of the wounded. And suddenly, as though it were born of the evening sun, the strains of a song broke out. It was Ignatiev who started it. Then another voice took it

up, followed by a third and a fourth. The men who were singing the song were invisible behind the trees, and it seemed as though the forest itself was singing sadly and majestically.

Red Army man Rodimtsev came up to Bogarev.

"Comrade Commissar, I've been sent to you by the men," he said holding out a red-cloth tobacco pouch embroidered with little green crosses.

"What's that?" asked Bogarev.

"The men decided amongst themselves," said Rodimtsev, "since it's so tough on all of us without a smoke, we'll pool our tobacco to give our Commissar a smoke."

"Whatever for," said Bogarev, a quiver in his voice, "your last tobacco. I won't take it. I know what it means, I'm a smoker myself."

Rodimtsev said softly:

"Comrade Commissar, the men send this from their very hearts. They'll be terribly offended."

Bogarev looked at Rodimtsev's serious, solemn face and mutely took the light little pouch.

"We couldn't rake up more than a handful amongst the whole lot of us; the Germans dropped that incendiary smack on the truck where the tobacco was; they knew where to hit us hardest. But the men say: 'Our Commissar doesn't sleep nights, keeps studying the map. The best thing is to let him have the smokes.'"

Bogarev wanted to thank Rodimtsev, but he was so deeply moved that the words stuck in his throat. For the first time since the war began there were tears in his eyes....

The slow, sad song grew louder and louder, as though it were swelling under the crimson glow of the setting sun.

KNOW YOURSELF

MERTSALOV woke up long before dawn. The aluminium mess tin standing on the table gleamed dully in the uncertain light. Beside it a map was spread out, held down at two corners by hand grenades so that the edges would not curl up. Mertsalov glanced at the new map and laughed to himself. The Chief of Staff had bought it from the Survey Department at Army H.Q. the day before and had solemnly declared:

"Comrade Mertsalov, on the old map we were always recording retreats. I've brought a new one. Tomorrow we'll christen it with a breakthrough of the German front."

And they had burned the grimy old map, obliterated at the folds, reflecting on its faded, wilted paper surface the bloody battles of the retreating Red Army. It had seen everything, this old burned map. Mertsalov had looked at it at dawn of June 22, when fascist bombers had flown across the border and appeared above sleeping artillery and infantry regiments. It had seen rain and hail, had been bleached by the sun of sultry July noondays, had fluttered in the wind on the broad expanses of the Ukrainian fields; the tall, primeval trees in the Byelorussian forests had looked down on it over the heads of the commanders.

"Well," said Mertsalov, and glanced disapprovingly at the gleaming mess tin. "We'll have to give them a coat of green, otherwise they give away the men, what with the sun flashing on them in the daytime and the way they gleam at night," he thought.

He pulled his kit-bag from under his bunk and opened it. A potpourri of smells rose from it—cheese, smoked sausage, eau de Cologne, soap. Every time he opened his suitcase, he thought of his wife, who had packed his things for him on the day of the German attack. "Well," repeated Mertsalov, and got himself some fresh underwear and a pair of socks. He lit a candle, shaved and left the dugout. He stood there for a moment looking around.

About an hour remained to dawn, and the east was still dark and quiet, as was the west. The earth was shrouded in a vast even gloom. A cold, dank fog hovered among the osiers and reeds on the river bank. You could not tell whether the dim sky was cloudy or clear, so still and motionless was it, like a great blind eye.

Mertsalov undressed and drawing a noisy breath dashed over the cold, wet sand to the river. "My stars!" he gasped as he plunged into the water. He was a long time soaping his head, his neck and ears, scrubbing his chest with a sponge. Having washed, he put on his clean underwear and returned to the dugout. Sitting down on his bunk he took a starched white slip from a bundle and sewed it inside the collar of his tunic. Sprinkling the last few drops of eau de Cologne in the bottle on the palm of his hand, he patted it into his cheeks and then talcumed his clean-shaven face, shaking out the powder that still remained in the cracks of the little box. After that he carefully wiped

his cheeks with a damp towel and began to dress leisurely, putting on his navy-blue breeches, a tunic and a new Sam Browne. He was long at cleaning his boots, first wiping the dust from them, then smearing them with polish, brushing them briskly and then whisking a bit of woollen cloth over them until they shone. After he had polished his boots he washed his hands again, combed his damp hair, stretched, examined his revolver and slipped it into the holster, and transferred the photograph of his wife and daughter to his tunic pocket.

"Well, that's that," he said glancing at his watch, and went off to wake the Chief of Staff.

It was beginning to grow light. The cold wind whistled among the reeds, lay like a quivering net over the river, scampered hurriedly over the open fields, jumped lightly over the trenches and anti-tank pits, sent the fine sand on the parapets swirling, and drove the tumble-weeds against the barbed-wire entanglements.

The sun rose in the skies over the vast fields, like a venerable old judge, knowing neither agitation nor passion, ready to occupy its accustomed lofty place. The dark night clouds began to glow like lumps of coal, burning with a lurid and dusky brick-coloured flame. Everything on this morning seemed sinister, heralding the turmoil of battle and death for many. It was an ordinary autumn morning. Over this territory on exactly such a morning one year ago, fishermen had passed on a visit to the village, and the ground, the sky, the sun and wind, all were filled for them with peace, tranquillity, and the beauty of the countryside. But this summer everything was ominous—the wells whose cool greenish-blue depths held poison, the haystacks in the moonlight, the apple orchards, the whitewashed walls of the cottages spattered with the blood of the victims whom the Germans had shot, the paths, the wind sighing through the wires, the deserted nests of storks, the melon-patches, the russet buckwheat; all the miracles of the Ukrainian soil drenched in blood and brackish with tears.

The attack began at 5 a.m. Black dive bombers flew over the infantry. These were new aircraft that had only recently arrived at the front. They flew at a very low altitude and the men could see under their wings the heavy bombs, ready to drop. Smoke rose over the German positions and a low rumbling rolled along the entire horizon. Simultaneously with the first avalanche of bombs the regimental and divisional artillery opened fire. The quiet air through which only the

morning wind had run so recently was filled with the whine and roar of explosions; no room now for the wind.

Mertsalov very much wanted to lead the 1st Battalion in the attack, but he kept himself in check. During these minutes for the first time he really felt the importance of his being at Headquarters. "Damn it, he was right after all," he thought angrily, recalling his distressing conversation with Bogarev that evening. Every day the memory of that disquieting conversation came back to him. And now he felt and saw how many threads were gathered in his hands. Even though every commander had been given explicit orders the evening before and knew perfectly what he had to do, even though instructions to bombers, attack planes and fighters were extremely precise and detailed, even though Major Seregin, commander of the heavy tank battalion, had pored over the map with Mertsalov for well over an hour, nevertheless, as soon as the attack had been launched the enemy had started vigorous countermeasures, and this immediately demanded skilful and swift manipulation of the entire intricate and mobile system.

Twice Soviet planes had flown over the German forward positions and black columns of smoke had risen over the German trenches and bunkers. But when the infantry had gone into attack immediately following on the heavy tanks, the Germans had opened heavy fire from all their artillery, mortar batteries and anti-tank cannon. The battalion commanders reported to Mertsalov by telephone that the infantry had halted and were pinned to the ground—the enemy fire was so intense that it was impossible to advance. Mertsalov jumped up and opened his holster—it was necessary to get the men on their feet at all costs, to advance! It seemed the simplest of matters to a man who knew no fear to dash into the thick of the fray. For a moment he experienced a feeling of savage disillusionment. Could it really be that he had so carefully and painstakingly prepared today's battle to no avail; could it be that he had for the first time worked out the details of the forthcoming encounter with such academic thoroughness to no avail?

"No, Comrade Chief of Staff," he said wrathfully, "war has always been and always will be the art of fearing neither enemy nor death! I must get the infantry on their feet!"

But he did not leave Headquarters. The telephone rang again, and immediately after it another call came.

"The air attack is having little effect on the enemy in his trenches,

The enemy is retaining his fire power," reported Kochetkov. "His guns and mortars are keeping up constant fire."

"The tanks are encountering heavy artillery fire, the infantry has halted and the tanks have gone on ahead. Two of them have had their tracks smashed," reported Seregin. "I don't think it advisable to advance further."

And once again the telephone rang—the Air Force Liaison Officer was enquiring about the effectiveness of the bombing and asking whether it would be advisable to plan the raids differently since the pilots were reporting that our infantry were not advancing, while the enemy artillery was still active.

Just then the Artillery Liaison Officer, a Lieutenant-Colonel, came into Headquarters with a number of important problems that required immediate attention.

Mertsalov lit a cigarette and sat down at his table frowning.

"Shall we repeat our raids on the infantry?" asked the Chief of Staff.

"No," replied Mertsalov.

"We should order the infantry to move forward again. The advanced units have halted some 300 metres from the enemy. It is possible to advance another 100 metres in spurts," said the Chief of Staff.

"No," replied Mertsalov.

He was sunk so deep in thought that he did not even look up when Divisional Commissar Cherednichenko came in. Nor did the Chief of Staff look up at him. The Divisional Commissar walked past the sentry, standing at attention in the dugout, sat down in a dark corner near the bunk where the messengers usually sat, and sucking on his pipe, calmly and attentively listened to the telephone conversations, closely observing Mertsalov and the Chief of Staff.

Cherednichenko had come to Mertsalov past Samarin's command post. He had wanted to be there when the attack began, and knowing that Samarin was always on the scene of any important operation, had decided to meet the Army Commander at the forward position.

Mertsalov gazed at the map, and with a mind intense to the point of physical pain tried to visualize the fighting as an integral whole, where there arose points of fierce intensity which then weakened and finally disappeared, creating a picture like that of an ever-changing magnetic field. He saw the pivots in the enemy's system of defence, pivots against which his attacks, varying as they were in intensity,

were nevertheless smashed. He saw how the various components which went to make up the whole were superimposed one on another, how their co-existence was purely automatic, not interfering with but giving one another greater impetus, like superimposed oscillations of equal wave length. His brain dynamically recreated the numerous factors that went to make up this intricate battle. He measured the striking force of the aircraft tearing to the attack, of the heavy tanks, of the counterfire of his field guns and heavy batteries, and he could feel the potential strength of Bogarev's troops lying behind the enemy's lines.

Everything stood out vividly in the brilliant and joyous light that seemed to flood his whole mind. An extraordinarily simple, mathematically irrefutable solution occurred to him. It is thus that a mathematician or physicist is sometimes overwhelmed at the outset of an experiment by the complexity and contradictory values of the elements he is investigating in some seemingly simple and ordinary phenomenon. The scientist tries passionately to combine, to bring into accord these disintegrating, antagonistic elements, but they slip away stubbornly, swiftly, resiliently. And as a reward for the arduous work of analysis, for the tense search for a solution, a simple and clear idea occurs to him that dispels all the complexity and yields the only correct and amazingly simple, irrefutable solution. This is what we call creative genius. And something of this kind was experienced by Mertsalov as he wrestled with the difficult problem that had arisen for him. Perhaps never before had he felt such agitation or such joy. He put his plan before the Chief of Staff.

"But, I say, this goes against. . . ." and the Chief of Staff enumerated those factors to which Mertsalov's proposal ran counter.

"What of it?" was Mertsalov's remark. "Remember what Babadjanyan said: 'The only limit I know is victory!' "

He deliberated for a moment. Yes, it sometimes required more strength and courage to take the responsibility for adopting a decision worked out on a map at H.Q. than to do some high deed of valour on the field of battle.

But Mertsalov found this courage in himself, the courage to decide. He knew that in a tough spot a Russian commander often sought to justify himself and get out of the situation by subjecting himself to the danger of death. There were times when on being asked to account for himself after an engagement he would answer: "When I

saw that things were going badly, I took the lead. What else could I have done?" But he knew that even this supreme sacrifice in no way relieved him of the responsibility for the outcome of the battle.

The situation was as follows. The blows of our aircraft had been unable to smash the German infantry, who had dug themselves in. German artillery and mortars hampered the movement of our tanks, cutting off the advancing infantry from them. The infantry that had moved ahead, their ranks thinned and their spirits damped by German artillery and mortar fire, came within the zone of German automatic-rifle and machine-gun fire. Our artillery, which outnumbered the German artillery by almost two to one was dissipating its strength by directing its fire along the entire broad front of the German outer defences. Mertsalov saw that the fire power of the Russian aircraft, tanks, artillery and infantry, evenly distributed as it was over all elements of the German defences, was devoting only a fourth or a fifth of its effective strength to the German guns and mortars. And it was these guns and mortars that had to be silenced. In that lay the key to success in the first phase of the attack.

Without raising his voice, Mertsalov issued his orders to the regimental and divisional artillery, to the heavy tank battalion, the attack aircraft, the bombers and fighters that had been bombing and machine-gunning the Germans on his instructions. He ordered the infantry to withdraw, take cover and prepare to strike out at the sectors of the front where the main forces of the German artillery and mortars were concentrated. Mertsalov knew that the Germans, relying on the power of their artillery, had only small infantry forces in those places. He knew that the fire power at his disposal would enable him to crush the German artillery without much difficulty. He chose the strongest sector of the German front for his objective realizing and sensing the possibility of the strongest becoming the weakest, thus preparing the way for a breakthrough.

The Chief of Staff groaned to himself when he heard Mertsalov's orders. Imagine concentrating infantry against artillery and mortars! Imagine withdrawing without a fight from positions that had been won with such difficulty and so much bloodshed!

"Does the infantry really have to withdraw? Comrade Mertsalov!" he exclaimed.

"That's my name," said the Regimental Commander, "and has been for the past thirty-five years."

"Comrade Mertsalov, we've advanced 800 metres; do you mean to say that we're not going to dig in?"

"I've given my orders, and I have no intention of changing them."

"But they'll blame you," said the Chief of Staff in a low voice. "You know how strict Samarin is. And here, at the very outset of the attack, and after our recent unsuccessful retreat at that, you're staking everything on one card."

"I am," said Mertsalov, and pointing to the table he added, "and the results will go on this map. Chuck it, Semyon Germogenovich. I know what I'm doing; I'm no youngster to be playing about."

Loud voices could be heard at the entrance to the dugout. Mertsalov and the Chief of Staff sprang to their feet smartly as General Samarin came towards them.

He glanced at the distressed face of the Chief of Staff and greeting him with a nod asked:

"Well, how's it going—have you broken through?"

"No, Comrade Major-General," replied Mertsalov, "we haven't broken through yet, but we will."

"Where are your battalions?" asked Samarin curtly.

As he had been approaching Regimental Headquarters he had encountered retreating tanks and infantry and had asked the Lieutenant on whose orders they were withdrawing.

"On orders of the Regimental Commander, Hero of the Soviet Union, Major Mertsalov," came the precise reply.

This reply had thrown Samarin into a fury.

"Where are your battalions, why are they withdrawing?" asked Samarin in a voice that was terrible by its very quietness.

"They are withdrawing in orderly fashion, at my instructions, Comrade Major-General," replied Mertsalov, and suddenly noticed that Samarin, drawing himself up stiffly, was looking at a man who was coming towards him from a dark corner of the dugout. He looked in that direction and also stood to attention.

Standing before them was a member of the Military Council of the Front.

"Good morning, Comrade Samarin, how do you do, comrades," said Cherednichenko. "I haven't said hello to you, thanks to the fact that the sentry here let me pass. I've been sitting over there on the bunk and watching how you fight.

"All the same I'm right," thought Mertsalov stubbornly, "and I'll show them."

Cherednichenko glanced at Samarin's scowling face, then at the worried Chief of Staff, and said:

"Comrade Mertsalov!"

"Yes, Comrade Divisional Commissar...."

For a second the Divisional Commissar looked him straight in the eye. And in this calm and somewhat wistful glance, Mertsalov saw with surprise and a glad lightening of his heart that the Divisional Commissar knew everything. He sensed that Cherednichenko realized what an important and solemn occasion this was in the military career of the Regimental Commander.

"Comrade Mertsalov," said Cherednichenko slowly. "I'm glad for your sake, Comrade Mertsalov. You're making a good job of directing the operations and I'm convinced that you will make good today." He threw a quick glance at Samarin and continued: "On behalf of the Service I want to thank you, Major Mertsalov."

"I'm at the service of the Soviet Union," replied the Regimental Commander.

"Well, what say, Samarin, shall we be going?" said Cherednichenko throwing an arm around the General's shoulders. "There's something we have to talk over. Besides we have to let people work. Here all of us chiefs have come swooping down on them, making them stand around on their toes when they've so much to do, let's leave them to it."

Before leaving the dugout, he went over to Mertsalov and asked him in a low voice:

"Well, how do you like your Commissar, Major?" and smiling he added quite softly: "Had a run in with him? Am I right? Did you?"

And to Mertsalov it was just as if Cherednichenko had been present at that evening tea, and was reminding him of the subtle connection that they knew existed between that night and the present day.

AT BRUCHMÜLLER'S HEADQUARTERS

COLONEL BRUCHMULLER, commanding the German unit which was preparing to force the river, was entertaining a visitor in the person of Colonel Grün, a representative of the General Staff who had arrived

the previous day. On the morning when the surprise Russian counter-attack began, they were breakfasting together at Headquarters, which was housed in a school building.

Bruchmüller and Grün were old acquaintances and had had a long talk on what was going on at the front and at home. Grün occupied a more distinguished post than the frontline colonel, but all the same he held his host in considerable respect. Bruchmüller was well known in the German army as a masterhand at handling artillery in the field. Colonel-General Brauchitsch had once said of him: "That man isn't named Bruchmüller for nothing!" Apparently Brauchitsch had in mind the colonel's famous namesake, who had won renown for his skill in organizing attacks with massed heavy artillery on the Western Front in World War I. And Grün, ignoring the intricate caste system in the army, which permitted intimacy exclusively with people of one's own circle, had been quite frank in what he told the stout, bald-headed colonel concerning the mood of the higher staff officers and the situation within Germany itself. His tales had both excited and distressed Bruchmüller.

"Yes," he had said with all the simplicity of a soldier, somewhat shocking Grün, "while we're fighting here, the wrangling's started over there. In the end all these intrigues—industrialists, National-Socialists, Fronde and counter-Fronde among the generals—will only muddle things up. It ought to be made quite clear: Germany is the army, the army at the front is Germany. It is we and we alone who should decide how and what."

"No," Grün had said, "tomorrow I will tell you about things no less important than successes at the front, things which are every day becoming more complicated, more insupportable for the higher officers. There are days when the situation is nothing short of paradoxical."

But they had been unable to continue the conversation the next morning because of the sudden offensive that had been launched by the Russians, which had naturally absorbed all their attention.

Communications were excellent, and Bruchmüller, ensconced in his Staff Headquarters, had a complete picture of the battle. Wireless or telephone brought him news of the course of the action every five or six minutes.

"The Russians usually go in for a frontal attack with equally distributed pressure all along the line. That's what they call 'hitting head-on,'" said Grün, glancing at the map, "and apparently they

themselves see the ineffectiveness of such action. In their orders this is frequently pointed out as a defect. But the orders remain on paper. That's characteristic of the Russians."

"Oh, that's what they're like," said Bruchmüller, "the Russians are a most peculiar people. But do you know, in all the fighting I have never once been able to make out the character of the commander opposing me; it's always diffused and hazy. I never know what he likes, which are his favourite weapons. It annoys me. I don't like fogs."

"What difference does it make?" said Grün. "We've put them up against all the intricacies of our modern German warfare. Aircraft, tanks, paratroops, mobile thrusts, combined blows, dynamic, three-dimensional warfare."

"By the way, they've brought up quite a large number of heavy tanks and new aircraft to our front. Their black armoured planes are particularly effective, *Der schwarze Tod* our men call them."

"Yes, but they can't do much with them. Look at this!" said Grün holding out the report which the clerk had just typed.

Bruchmüller smiled.

"You must admit," he said, "things here are so well organized that even if you or I came up against such a system of defences as ours we'd just have to throw up our hands in despair."

And leaning forward so that his broad chest rested on the table, he began to give an enthusiastic account of his system of gun emplacements.

"It reminds me of a toy my son is fond of playing with," he said. "It consists of three rings, one linking into the second, the second into the third, and the third into the first again. The thing is to puzzle out how to separate them. You can't break them, they're made of steel! The secret is that the rings open just where they seem strongest and most solid."

Telephone and wireless brought good news from battalions, companies and batteries: the Russian attack was fizzling out.

"It astonishes me that they managed to advance 800 metres. I don't deny their courage," said Grün. Lighting a cigarette, he asked: "When do you propose to force the river?"

"In three days' time," answered Bruchmüller. "I have my orders." His spirits suddenly rose and he felt in an extraordinarily good mood. Patting his stomach, he said:

"What under the sun should I have done if I had remained in Germany with my appetite? I expect I should have pegged out. Believe it or not, I want my lunch already. I have everything I want here. I've been fighting since the first of September, 1939, and, by God, I could act as culinary adviser in the best luxury hotel by now. I've made it a rule always to eat the national dishes of the country where I'm fighting. In the matter of food I'm a cosmopolitan." He cast a rapid sidelong glance at Grün. Could such a skinny individual, whose sole drink was black coffee and who dined on bouillon with dry toast and boiled chicken, have any interest in such matters? Maybe his own weakness for good cooking, a weakness of which Bruchmüller was proud, would simply be disgusting to Grün.

But Grün was smiling and listening to him with interest. He liked the colonel's lively talk about food. It would make an amusing story to tell in Berlin.

Bruchmüller, thus encouraged, went on:

"In Poland I ate *zrazu* and *flaki*, queer stuff but devilish tasty, *klocki*, *knysze* and sweet *mazurki*, and I drank *starka*; in France I tried all kinds of *ragoûts*, *légumes*, *artichauts*, *fin rôti*, and did I drink real imperial wines there! In Greece I reeked of garlic like an old market woman, and I was afraid my insides would simply burn up with all the pepper I ate. Well, and here it's sucking pig, goose, turkey and a perfectly delicious dish, *va-ren-i-ki*, sort of little boiled white dumplings with either cherries or cottage cheese inside them and just smothered in sour cream. You must try them today."

"No, thank you," said Grün, laughing and raising his hand as though fending off some danger. "I want to see Berlin and my wife and children again."

Just then the adjutant announced that the Russian tanks were withdrawing, covering the retreating infantry with their fire, that Russian aircraft were no longer appearing over the infantry positions and that artillery of all calibres had ceased fire.

"There you are, that's your infamous fog for you," said Grün.

"No, that's not it," answered Bruchmüller, frowning. "I know how stubborn the Russians can be."

"Do you still believe in the fog?" asked Grün jokingly.

"I believe in our arms," answered Bruchmüller. "Maybe they've quieted down and maybe they haven't. Most likely, not. That's not

important. What is important is this," and he struck the map with the back of his hand.

Clusters of red circles had been drawn with a thick Faber pencil between the green of the forests and the blue of the rivers and lakes. These were the emplacements of the German artillery and mortars.

"That's what I believe in," repeated Bruchmüller.

He uttered these words slowly and weightily. It seemed to Grün that Bruchmüller had in mind not only the war effort of the Russians but also the subject of their yesterday's conversation.

Fifteen minutes later the telephone told them that the Russians were again active.

The first bomber attacks were directed against the German heavy batteries. Immediately afterwards came the report that the 75 mm. guns of the Russian heavy tanks had smashed into the German battalion mortar positions. Then Major Schwalbe reported that his 105 mm. guns had come under a hurricane of Russian heavy artillery fire.

Bruchmüller immediately realized that the Russian attack was no longer evenly distributed all along the line, but had a definite direction. He could all but feel the forceful, alarming prick of a sharp weapon that was searching around for his guns. He was so closely and habitually connected with his forces that this feeling developed into a physical reality, and all unconsciously he put his hand on his chest in an effort to get rid of this disturbing and disquieting sensation. But the feeling did not disappear, it continued.

The Russian bombers had scarcely flown away before their fighters appeared over the artillery positions. Battery commanders reported that they could not maintain fire because the gunners had taken cover in the dugouts.

"Maintain fire at all costs and with maximum intensity," ordered Bruchmüller.

He was immediately keyed up to the highest pitch. The devil take it, not for nothing did he bear the name of Bruchmüller! Not for nothing was he known and respected throughout the army! He was indeed an experienced, resolute and capable soldier. When he was still at the Academy his instructors had spoken of him as being representative of the real German officers' corps.

The whole of the huge, well-ordered, well-oiled and excellently functioning staff machine seemed to tremble under the force of his will power, and immediately got under way. Telephone bells rang;

the adjutant and subalterns moved smartly from the field telegraph office to the colonel's room; the radio transmitter buzzed away incessantly; despatch riders gulped down a Russian schnapps, jammed their caps down over their eyes, and dashing out of the schoolyard raced away on their motorcycles in clouds of dust along roads and paths.

Bruchmüller himself spoke over the telephone with his battery commanders.

No sooner did the Soviet fighter aircraft make off than dive bombers appeared over the gun emplacements. Bruchmüller realized that the Russian commander's objective was to smash and silence his big guns. Gun after gun was put out of action. Two batteries of mortars were wiped out together with their crews. The Russians were systematically going for one gun emplacement after the other.

Bruchmüller called up the infantry battalion which he had been holding in reserve, but within a few minutes he was informed that the Russian attack planes had come skimming over the column of troop-laden trucks as they advanced towards the front and had plastered them with cannon and machine-gun fire. Bruchmüller ordered the infantry to abandon the trucks and to proceed on foot. But even this was impossible, as the Russians opened concentrated fire on the road, making it impassable.

For the first time in his life the colonel felt as if his hands were tied. Somebody's will was hindering him, interfering with his arrangements. It was an unbearable thought that for even a minute the man on the other side of the front should have the advantage of him.

Quite suddenly he recalled how a year ago, when he had been in France, he had attended at an unusually delicate operation which was being made by an eminent professor, a world authority on brain surgery, who was visiting the front. The professor had introduced a strange, flexible instrument, something halfway between a needle and a knife, into the nose of the unconscious patient, and with his dexterous white fingers had worked the gleaming instrument farther and farther into the patient's nose. They explained to Bruchmüller that the injury was somewhere above the occipital bone and that the professor was getting at it by introducing his slim instrument between the cranium and the cerebrum. The operation had amazed Bruchmüller. And now, at this moment, it appeared to him that the man opposed to him had just

such an intent face, such dexterous fingers as that surgeon who passed his steel instrument through the darkness between the precious nerve centre and the thread-like nerve fibres.

Fuming, Bruchmüller sent for his adjutant.

"Why are you here? You're an artilleryman and an officer. You reported to me personally the death of three battery commanders, and the heroic death of Major Schwalbe, my best aide. It is your duty as a serviceman to ask me of your own accord to transfer you to the firing line. Or do you imagine that your military duties are limited to the shooting of old women and little boys suspected of sympathizing with the guerillas?"

"Herr Oberst . . ." began the offended adjutant, but catching the expression on Bruchmüller's face he blurted out hurriedly: "Herr Oberst, I have the honour to request you to transfer me to the firing line."

"You may go," said Bruchmüller.

"What's happening?" asked Grün.

"What's happening is that the Russian is showing his character at last," answered Bruchmüller.

Again he leaned over the map. The enemy was calmly developing the game. Now Bruchmüller could see his face.

"Russian infantry is attacking our artillery positions," came the report from the forward positions. At the same moment an officer came running in shouting:

"Herr Oberst, Russian heavy artillery is firing from our rear."

"No, I'll outplay him yet," remarked Bruchmüller with conviction. "He won't get the better of me."

The wind slammed the open French windows to, set the doors creaking, and made the big picture on the wall rustle. The print of the shaggy brown head of prehistoric man fluttered in such a fashion that his powerful jaws seemed to be working as though he were setting them stubbornly.

DEATH WILL NOT CONQUER!

RUMYANTSEV'S observation post was quite near the Germans. Lieutenant Klenovkin, who was lying in the bushes, saw two officers coming out of an underground shelter, drinking coffee and smoking. He could hear their conversation distinctly, saw a telephonist reporting to them

and one of the officers, evidently the senior, giving him some order. Fuming at himself, Klenovkin glanced at his watch. It was a shame that he had not studied German when he had had the chance. He could hear every word they said but could not understand it. The howitzers were in position on the edge of the woods, a thousand metres from where Klenovkin was lying. The infantry were concentrated there too. The wounded had also been brought up. They were lying on stretchers and in trucks, which were ready at a moment's notice to follow on through the breach after the advancing infantry.

Telephonist Martynov, who was lying beside Klenovkin, watched the German telephonist with particular interest. He was both amused and irritated by this German who held the same job as he did.

"Sly mug he has. You can see he's a boozer," whispered Martynov. "Still, if you put him on to our apparatus he wouldn't be able to make head or tail of it, that damned German wouldn't!"

Everyone's nerves were unusually strained, beginning with Klenovkin, who was lying quite close to the German dugouts, and ending with the wounded and the youngster Lenya, waiting in the dim forest for the attack to begin. The artillery barrage, automatic-rifle and machine-gun fire, and the explosion of bombs were roaring without let-up. Aircraft with Red Stars on their wings kept zooming over the heads of the Red Army men toward the German positions. The men were hard put to keep a check on themselves—not to wave excitedly or shout when the planes dived over the German trenches.

Bogarev was no less agitated than the others. He could see that both Rumyantsev and the fearless, jolly Kozlov were tense and overwrought with the waiting. The operations which they had agreed were to precede the attack had already passed. The time that had been agreed on for launching the combined blow had passed. And still the signal was not given. Whenever the din of the battle grew louder, the commanders would break off their conversation and begin to listen attentively and to look around. But still there was nothing. Mertsalov did not call them.

Strange indeed and unusual did this battle sound to the men who were behind the German lines. All the sounds were reversed: the bursting shells were the Russians', the artillery salvoes were being fired by the Germans. Occasionally a bullet whistled overhead, and this was the whistle of a Russian bullet. The chatter of automatic rifles and the machine-gun bursts sent by the Germans sounded par-

ticularly ominous and alarming. And this unwonted state of affairs, this topsy-turvy noise of battle also affected the men.

They lay behind trees, in the underbrush, in the tall hemp that had not yet been gathered, listening and peering intently into the clear morning air, darkened only here and there by smoke and dust.

How good the earth was in those moments! How precious to the men seemed its heavy folds, the sere hillocks, the ravines, overgrown with dusty burdocks, the forest pits. What a marvellous fragrance emanated from the earth—humus, dry dust and forest dampness, mould and mushrooms, dry berries and fallen twigs so often sodden with rain, then crisp and crackling again. The breeze wafted the warm and nostalgic fragrance of faded flowers and withered grass from the fields. In the half light of the forest, suddenly pierced by the rays of the sun, a dusty rainbow began to glow on a spider's web moist with dewdrops, seeming to breathe a miracle of tranquillity and peace.

There lies Rodimtsev, with his face pressed to the earth. But he is not sleeping. His eyes are fixed on the ground near the briar bush. He is breathing deeply, drawing in the fragrance of the soil. He is watching with interest, eagerly and attentively, what is going on around him. An ant column is marching along an invisible road, dragging bits of dry grass and twigs. "Maybe they're at war too," muses Rodimtsev, "and these are columns that have been mobilized to dig trenches and build fortifications. Or maybe some one is building a new house, and these are carpenters and masons on their way to work...."

The world which his eyes see, his ears hear, his nostrils breathe in is enormous. An arshin of earth at the woodland's edge and a briar bush. How enormous is this arshin of land! How rich this flowerless bush! Across the dry ground like a fine streak of lightning is a crack. The ants pass along a bridge in strict order one after the other, while those on the other side of the crack patiently wait their turn. A ladybird—a plump little old woman in a red calico dress—is hurrying along, looking for the crossing. And see there—a field mouse's eyes glisten as he rises on his hind legs and rustles around in the grass just as if no one were there. A gust of wind, and the grasses sway and bow, each kind in its own way, some humbly and quickly prostrating themselves to earth, others stubbornly, angrily, quivering, their flat, empty ears puffing out—food for the sparrows. And on the briar bush the hips stir—yellow, reddish, fired by the sun like clay by flame. A spider's web, which has obviously long been abandoned

by its owner, sways in the wind; in it are entangled dry leaves, bits of bark, and in one spot there is even a fallen acorn weighing it down. It looks like a net that has been thrown up on the shore, the fisherman drowned.

And how much there is of such land, such woods, how many countless arshins where life exists. How many dawns even more beautiful than this Rodimtsev had seen and heard in his lifetime, how many swift summer rains, how many bird calls, cool breezes, night mists! How much work! And how wonderful were the hours when he came home from work and his wife asked him sternly and yet with loving concern: "Are you going to eat your dinner?" And he had eaten mashed potatoes with sunflower seed oil and watched his children and the sunburned arms of his wife in the quiet closeness of the cottage. And now how much of life is there ahead.... Can it be much? After all everything can end right here, in the space of a brief five minutes. And hundreds of Red Army men are lying in the same way thinking, recalling home and wife and children, looking at the earth, the trees, the bushes, breathing in the morning fragrance. There is no better earth than this in the whole world.

Thoughtfully Ignatiev says to his comrade:

"The other day I overheard a conversation between two lieutenants in the ack-acks. Just imagine, they said, here's a war going on and all around are orchards and birds singing; what we do doesn't matter a bit to them.... I've been thinking about that. It's not so. Those chaps simply didn't look into it deeply enough. All life has been affected by this war. Take horses. What don't they suffer! Or I remember when we were stationed in Rogachev. Every time there was an air alarm the dogs would crawl into the cellars. I even saw one bitch hiding her puppies in a ditch, and as soon as the raid was over, she took them out for a walk again. And what about the birds—geese, chickens, turkeys—don't they suffer at the hands of the Germans? And here, all around us—in the woods I've noticed that the birds have begun to be frightened—as soon as a plane appears, clouds of them rise into the air, twittering and screaming as they whirr off. How much woodland has been destroyed! How many orchards! Or, I've just been thinking—there's fighting going on; about a thousand of us come and flop down here—and the whole life of these ants and mosquitoes goes bang. And if the Germans start using gas, and we answer in kind—why, it'll play hell with life all over the woods, and

in all the fields; the war will reach even the mice and the hedgehogs. It'll get to everyone and everything."

He rose to his feet and looking at his comrades said with wistful joy:

"Oh, but it's good to be alive, chaps! It's only on a day like this that you realize it. Seems like you could lie like this for a thousand years and never get tired of it! You can breathe!"

Bogarev listened to the sound of the fighting. Suddenly the howl of explosions began to die down. The red-starred planes were no longer flying over the German positions. Was it possible that the attack had been repulsed? Was it possible that Mertsalov had been unable to smash the German defences to the extent of launching a joint attack with Bogarev? Sorrow gripped Bogarev's heart. The thought that Mertsalov might have failed was intolerable, agonizing. He no longer saw the light of the sun; it seemed to him that the blue sky had darkened and become black. He did not see the open glade spreading before him. Everything, the trees, the fields, faded away. His entire being was filled with hatred for the Germans, hatred alone. Here, on the outskirts of the forest, he could clearly picture the sinister force that was crawling over the land of the people. The land belonged to the people! In Moore's utopia and Owen's visions, in the works of the great French philosophers, in the writings of the Decembrists, the essays of Belinsky and Herzen, in the correspondence of Zhelyabov and Mikhailov, in the words of the weaver Alexeyev was expressed the eternal yearning of mankind for a land owned by all, a land where the eternal inequality between those who work and those who provide work has been done away with. Thousands upon thousands of Russian revolutionaries had perished in the struggle. Bogarev knew them like brothers. He had read about all of them, knew their last words and letters to their mothers and children, knew their diaries and their secret conversations, recorded by friends who had lived to see liberty, knew the roads they had travelled to exile in Siberia, the stations where they had stayed the night, the jails where they had been put in fetters. He loved these people and honoured them as his nearest and dearest. Many of them were workers from Kiev, printers from Minsk, tailors from Vilna, weavers from Byelostok—cities now occupied by the fascists.

With every fibre of his being Bogarev loved this land that had been won in the storm and strife of the Civil War, amidst the tortures

of hunger. The land, be it still poor, be it still living a life of stern toil, stern laws....

Slowly he made his way among the men stretched on the ground, stopping from time to time to say a few words and walking on.

"If Mertsalov," he thought to himself, "does not give the signal within one hour, I shall lead the men into the attack and break through the German defences on my own.... In exactly one hour."

"Mertsalov must be successful," he told Kozlov, "there's no other way about it, or I have seen nothing and understood nothing."

He caught sight of Ignatiev and Rodimtsev, walked over to them and sat down on the grass. It seemed to him that at this moment they must be talking and thinking of the same thing that occupied his thoughts.

"What are you talking about here?" he asked.

"Well, you see, we're discussing mosquitoes," said Ignatiev with a shamefaced grin.

"Mosquitoes," thought Bogarev. "Are we then really thinking about different things in this hour?"

The signal was seen by scores of the men—red rockets shooting from the Russian lines towards the German. And on the instant Rumyantsev's howitzers thundered forth. A thousand men froze stock-still. The thunder of the howitzers informed the Germans that Russian troops had concealed themselves in their rear.

Bogarev cast a swift, happy glance around the field, squeezed the hand of Kozlov, who was on the right flank, and said to him: "I'm banking on you, my friend," drew a deep breath and shouted:

"Follow me, comrades, forward!"

And not a man remained lying on the kind, warm, summer earth.

Bogarev ran ahead and an unwonted emotion seized his entire being. He drew the men after him, but they, too, bound to him in a single, eternal and indivisible whole, seemed to be impelling him forward. He heard their heavy breathing behind him, and the rapid, passionate beating of their hearts was transmitted to him. This was the people who were fighting for their freedom. Bogarev heard the tramp of boots, and this was the tread of all Russia passing over to the attack. They were running faster and faster, and the shouts of "Hurrah!" kept swelling and rising, growing and spreading. It was heard through the thunder of the battle by Mertsalov's battalions as they charged in a bayonet attack. It was heard by the peasants in the

distant village occupied by the enemy. This "Hurrah!" was heard by the birds soaring into the heavens. This "Hu-r-r-ah!" shook the blue air and galvanized the earth.

The Germans fought desperately. With masterly skill and speed they formed a spherical defence line, opening machine-gun fire. But the two waves of Russian infantry advanced steadily towards each other. The steel tanks that had been dug into the ground flared up with the intensity of the Russian fire. Staff cars were devoured by flames while rich baggage trains crammed with stolen goods were smashed to smithereens. Were these the same men that not long ago had feared a loud word in the forest; were these the men that had listened so fearfully to the cawing of the crows, taking it for Germans talking?

By now Mertsalov's battalion not only heard the "Hurrah!" that came from the German rear, but already saw the begrimed faces of their comrades, covered with the sweat of battle, already distinguished between the grenadiers and the riflemen, already made out the black tabs of the artillerymen and the star on Lieutenant Kozlov's forage cap.

But the Germans still fought on. Perhaps it was not only pluck that governed their stubbornness, perhaps it was that the belief in their own invincibility with which they were intoxicated did not want to leave them in this moment of defeat. Perhaps it was that the soldiers, accustomed to victory for seven hundred days, could not and would not understand that on this seven hundred and first day defeat had come to them.

But the line of their front was breached and smashed....

The first two Red Army men met, embraced, and through the roar on the field a voice shouted:

"Give us a fag, brother; I haven't smoked for a week!"

And there the first surrounded German machine-gunners raised their hands, and a hump-nosed, freckled automatic-rifleman shrieked: "Russ, don't shoot," and threw his suddenly useless black tommy gun to the ground. And there, with hanging heads, a chain of prisoners was already passing, minus their forage caps, their jackets open at the throat, unbuttoned so recently in the heat of the battle, their pockets turned inside out to show that they carried no revolvers or grenades. And there the clerks, the telephone and radio operators were being led out of Headquarters. And there the grim, battle-stained

men were silently gazing at the corpse of a stout German colonel who had sent a bullet through his brain. And there a young commander was already counting up with a rapid glance the German guns and automatic rifles, machines and tanks abandoned on the field.

"Where is the Commissar?" the men asked of each other.

"Where is the Commissar?" asked Rumyantsev.

"Who has seen the Commissar?" asked Kozlov, wiping the sweat from his brow.

"The Commissar was with us all the time," said the men, "the Commissar was with us."

"Where is the Commissar?" asked Mertsalov loudly, making his way among the wrecked machines, grimy, filthy, his new tunic tattered and torn.

And they whispered: "The Commissar was in front, the Commissar was with us."

Over the now silent battlefield mercilessly lit up by the sun, over blackened pools of dried blood, past still smoking tanks and charred skeletons of wrecked trucks a small khaki armoured car drove up. Cherednichenko stepped out.

"Comrade Cherednichenko," said Mertsalov to him, "your son is in that baggage train that's coming along now. Bogarev took him away with his detachment."

"My Lenya," said Cherednichenko. "My son? And my mother?. . ."

He looked at Mertsalov, and Mertsalov, without replying, lowered his eyes. Cherednichenko stood there mutely, watching the distant blazing trucks that had come out of the forest.

"My son," he said again, "my son. . . ."

And turning to Mertsalov he asked:

"Where is the Commissar?"

The wind whistled over the field. . . .

From over there, where the flames were already beginning to burn low, two men were coming. Everyone knew them. Bogarev and Ignatiev. Blood seeped through their clothing. They walked supporting one another, with slow, heavy steps.

Central Front
Gomel-Bryansk

1949

THE OLD SCHOOLMASTER

I

THESE last few years Boris Isaacovich Rosenthal went out only when the weather was warm and fine. On rainy or foggy days, or when there was a severe frost he would get dizzy. Dr. Weintraub said the dizziness was caused by sclerosis, and advised him to take fifteen drops of iodine in a little milk before meals.

On warm days Boris Isaacovich went out into the yard with a book. He never took learned books with him as the hubbub made by the children, and the laughter and the bickering of the women distracted him. He would take a small volume of Chekhov and sit down on a bench near the well. Holding the book on his lap, he would keep it open at one and the same page, and sit there, his eyes half closed, a sleepy smile on his face such as one sees on the blind as they listen to the hum of life about them. He did not read, but he was so fond of books that it gave him pleasure to caress the rough binding, to feel the thickness of the page with his tremulous fingers. The women sitting nearby would say to one another: "Look, the teacher has fallen asleep," and go on talking about their own affairs as if they were alone. But he was not asleep. He was delighting in the sun-warmed stone bench, breathing in the aroma of onion and sunflower seed oil, listening to the old women as they gossiped about their daughters and sons-in-law, hearing the ruthless, frenzied excitement of the youngsters at their games. Sometimes heavy wet sheets would be flapping on a clothesline like sails and the dampness would be wafted into his face reminding him of his youth when, as a student, he had skimmed over the sea on a sailboat. He loved books, but they did not stand like a wall between him and life. Life was his God.

His God was a living, earthy, sinful God, whom he saw as he read the historians and philosophers, as he read the great and minor artists who, each to the extent of his ability, praised, justified, accused and cursed man on this wonderful earth. He sat in the yard and listened to the shrill voices of the children:

"Look out! There's a butterfly coming over. Fire!"

"We've got it! Stone it! Whang!"

Boris Isaacovich was not shocked by this cruelty. He had known it during the whole course of his eighty-two years of life, and had never been afraid of it.

Little six-year-old Katya, the daughter of the late Lieutenant Weisman, came up to him in her torn little dress, shuffling along in rubbers that kept slipping off her grimy scratched feet; holding out a cold, sour pancake, she said:

"Eat it, teacher!"

He took the pancake and ate it, his eyes fixed on the child's thin face. A sudden hush fell in the yard, and everyone—the old crones and the young full-breasted women who had forgotten their husbands, and the one-legged Lieutenant Voronenko lying on a mattress under a tree—turned to look at the old man and the little girl. Boris Isaacovich had dropped his book, but he did not stoop to pick it up. He was staring into the big eyes that were so intently and hungrily watching him eat. He longed once again to fathom the miracle of human kindness that always stirred him so; he wanted to read the answer in these child's eyes, but they were too dark, or perhaps tears dimmed his vision, for again he saw nothing, again the riddle was unsolved.

The neighbours were always wondering why the director of a teachers' training college and the chief engineer of the sugar refinery and once even a military man with two decorations visited this old man who was living on a pension of a hundred and twelve rubles a month and did not even have so much as a kerosene stove or a teakettle to his name.

"They used to be my pupils," he explained. And to the postman who sometimes brought him as many as two or three letters at a time he also said: "Those are from my former pupils." They remembered him, his former pupils.

There he sat in the yard on the morning of June 5, 1942, and beside him, on a mattress that had been brought out of the house, sat Lieutenant Victor Voronenko, whose leg had been amputated above the knee. Darya Semyonovna, Voronenko's pretty young wife, was getting dinner ready on the stove that had been put out in the yard for the summer. Bending over her pots and pans, she wept softly. Voronenko, a wry grimace wrinkling his pale face, tried to comfort her.

"What's there to cry about, Dasha?" he said. "You just wait, I'll grow a new leg yet."

"It's not that. It doesn't matter so long as you're alive," said Darya Semyonovna, sobbing. "It's something else altogether."

At one in the afternoon an alert was sounded: a German plane

was heading towards the town. Snatching up their children the women ran to the slit trenches. Only Voronenko and Boris Isaacovich remained in the yard. A youngster shouted from the street:

"A tank car's stopped near us—it's a target. The driver ducked in the shelter!"

At the first distant sound of the German aircraft motor the dogs, who had already been through numerous raids, put their tails between their legs and scuttled into the shelter in the wake of the women.

For a moment everything was quiet, and then the youngsters shrilly announced:

"Here it comes.... It's banking.... Diving, dirty skunk!"

A terrible blow shook the little town. Smoke and dust rose high into the air. From the shelters came the sound of shrieks and wailing. Then it was quiet again and the women crawled out of the trench shelters, shook off the dust, straightened out their dresses, poking fun at one another, brushed the dust and dirt from their children's clothes, and rushed back to their stoves.

"May he go stark, raving mad; may he land in a crazy house; that lovely fire did go out after all," muttered the old women as they puffed away at the embers in their stoves, eyes streaming with the smoke. "May he come to no good in this world or the next!"

Voronenko explained that the German had dropped a two hundred kilogram H.E. and that the ack-acks had missed by at least five hundred metres.

"I wish the Germans were here already so there'd be an end to this misery," old lady Mikhailyuk mumbled. "Yesterday during the alert some louse stole a pot of borsch from my stove."

Everyone in the yard knew that her son, Yashka, had deserted from the army and was hiding in the attic, coming out only at night. Mikhailyuchka said that if anyone reported on him, when the Germans came he would be sorry. And the women were afraid to report—the Germans were too close.

Koryako, the agronomist, who had not evacuated with the District Board of Agriculture, but went around loudly declaring that he would leave with the troops at the very last minute, ran into his room as soon as the alarm was given—he lived on the ground floor—gulped down a glass of homebrew, which he called "anti-bombing," and went down to the cellar. When the "all clear" was sounded, Koryako walked around the yard and said:

"Anyway our town is an impregnable fortress. All that Jerry did was to bust up a shack."

The small boys were the first to come running back from the street, bringing exact information:

"A bomb fell right in front of the Zabolotsky's house. Rabinovich's goat was killed. Old Missis Miroshenko's leg was blown off and they took her away on a stretcher, but she died on the way to the hospital. Her daughter's carrying on so you can hear her four blocks away."

That evening Dr. Weintraub visited Boris Isaacovich. Weintraub was sixty-eight. He wore a light pongee jacket and his shirt was open at the throat, exposing a plump chest overgrown with fuzzy grey hair.

"Well, how're things, young man?" asked Boris Isaacovich.

But the young man was breathing heavily as a result of the climb to the second floor, and merely panted as he pointed to his chest. At last he said:

"We've got to leave. They say the last train of workers from the sugar refinery is leaving tomorrow. I reminded Engineer Shevchenko, and he promised to send a cart for you."

"Shevchenko was one of my pupils. He was a wizard at geometry," said Boris Isaacovich. "We should ask him to take Voronenko. His wife found him in a hospital five days ago and took him home with her. And Weisman and her baby. Her husband's been killed; she received an official notification."

"I don't know if there'll be room. There are several hundred workers, you know," said Weintraub, and suddenly went on hurriedly, his hot breath fanning Boris Isaacovich's face. "So that's how it is, Boris Isaacovich. The town where literally every dog knows me, just imagine—I came here on the sixteenth of June, 1901." He smiled wryly. "And what a coincidence. It was in this house, in this very house, that I visited my first patient forty-one years ago—Mikhailyuk, who was down with ptomaine poisoning. Since then who is there I haven't treated here—him, and his wife, and Yashka Mikhailyuk with his everlasting bellyaches, and Dasha Tkachuk, even before she married Voronenko, and Dasha's father, and Vitya Voronenko. And that's how it is in practically every house. Oh, well. To live to see the day when I would have to run away from here! And let me tell you frankly the closer it comes to going away, the less decided I feel. I keep thinking I'll stay. Come what may."

"And I'm more than ever determined to go," said Boris Isaacovich. "I know what it's like travelling in a packed freight car for a man of eighty-two. I have no one in the Urals, and I haven't a kopek to my name. And what's more," he said with a wave of his hand, "I know, I'm even positive, that I won't last to the Urals. But that's the best way out—to die knowing that you have preserved your dignity as a human being, to die in a country where you're regarded as a human being."

"I don't know about that," said Weintraub. "In my opinion it's not so terrible. After all, professional people, as you yourself know, are not picked up in the street just like that."

"You're pretty naive, young man," said Boris Isaacovich.

"I don't know, I don't know," said the doctor. "I can't make up my mind. Many of my patients are trying to talk me into staying.... But there are others who strongly advise me to go."

Suddenly he jumped up and shouted:

"What's it all about? Tell me! I came to see you so that you would explain it to me, Boris Isaacovich! You're a philosopher, a mathematician. Tell me, a doctor, what it means. Is it all a delirious nightmare? How could a cultured European nation that has established such clinics, that has produced such distinguished men in the world of medicine, become the vehicle of Black Hundred mediæval obscurantism? What is the source of this spiritual infection? What is it? Mass psychosis? Mass insanity? Deterioration? Or is it all not quite so, eh? Has it perhaps been laid on a little too thickly?"

The tapping of crutches was heard on the stairs and then Voronenko's mocking voice:

"May I have a word with you, chief?"

Weintraub immediately calmed down.

"Ah, Vitya," he said. "How are things?"

"Minus a leg, as you see," Voronenko said with a bitter laugh. He always spoke of his misfortune jeeringly, ashamed of it.

"Well, have you read the book?" asked Boris Isaacovich.

"The book?" echoed Voronenko. He kept smiling nervously and frowning. "The book, my eye! We'll be having some book pretty soon, all right!" Abruptly Voronenko drew closer to Boris Isaacovich, bending over him. His face became calm, still. In a low, distinct voice he said slowly: "German tanks have crossed the railway

track and have occupied the village of Maliye Nizgurtsy. That's about twenty kilometres east of here."

"Eighteen and a half," said the doctor. "I suppose that means the train won't be leaving?"

"That goes without saying," said Boris Isaacovich.

"A nice little pocket," said Voronenko, and added thoughtfully: "Sewn up tight."

"So that's that," murmured Weintraub. "We'll live and see. It's fate. Well, I'll be going along home."

Boris Isaacovich looked at him steadily.

"All my life, as you know," he said, "I've never liked medicine, but right now I want you to give me the one medicine that can help."

"What, what can help?" Weintraub asked quickly.

"Poison."

"I'll never do that!" cried Weintraub. "I've never done anything like that."

"You're a naive young man," said Boris Isaacovich. "Epicurus, as you know, taught that a wise man may kill himself out of love for life if his sufferings become unbearable. And I love life no less than Epicurus did."

He rose and drew himself up to his full height. His hair, his face, his trembling fingers and frail neck were all withered, faded with time, looked transparent, light, weightless. In his eyes alone shone the light of intellect that was not subject to time.

"No, no!" said Weintraub as he walked over to the door. "Mind what I say, somehow we'll see our sufferings through."

Turning on his heel he went out.

"There's one thing I'm afraid of more than anything else!" said Boris Isaacovich, "that the people among whom I've lived all my life, whom I love and whom I trust, will be taken in by some vile, underhand provocation."

"No, that will never happen!" said Voronenko.

The night was dark with the clouds that covered the sky and hid the light of the stars. It was dark with the shadows of the earth. The Hitlerites were giving the lie to life. And wherever they set foot, out of the murk there rose to the surface cowardice, treachery, lust for foul murder, for violence against the weak. All that was vile it brought to the surface, as in the old fairy tales some ugly word

of witchcraft calls forth the spirit of evil. That night the little town gasped in the clutches of all that was shady and wicked, evil and filthy, of all that wakened and stirred, roused by the arrival of the Hitlerites and stretching forth to meet them. Out of their holes and cellars, crawled traitors; the weak in spirit tore up their volumes of Lenin, their Party membership cards and letters and burned them, tore the pictures of their brothers down from the walls. In their abject souls fawning words of disavowal matured; thoughts of vengeance for some silly quarrel in the market were born, for some chance word hastily spoken; hearts filled with hardness, selfishness and indifference. Cowards, fearing for their own safety, concocted reports against their neighbours in order to save their own skins. And so it was and so it had been in all big and little cities of big and little states—wherever the Hitlerites set foot, the turbid dregs rose from the bottoms of rivers and lakes; toads swam to the surface; thistles sprang up where wheat had grown.

Boris Isaacovich did not sleep that night. He felt as if the sun would never rise in the morning, as if darkness had engulfed the town for all eternity. But the sun rose at its accustomed hour, and the sky became blue and cloudless, and the birds began to sing.

A German bomber flew over, slowly and at a low altitude, as if it had been exhausted by a sleepless night. The anti-aircraft guns did not open fire—the town and the heavens over the town had become German. The house wakened.

Yashka Mikhailyuk came down from the attic. He walked around in the yard. Then he sat down on the bench where Boris Isaacovich had been sitting the day before.

Dasha Voronenko was firing the stove.

"Well," he said to her, "where is your famous defender of the homeland? Have the Reds run off and left him behind?"

Smiling wanly, pretty Dasha said:

"Don't you report on him. After all, Yasha, he was drafted like all the others."

After his long confinement in the darkness, Yashka Mikhailyuk had come out into the warm sunshine, was breathing the morning air, seeing the green shoots in the garden. He had shaved and put on an embroidered shirt.

"O.K.," he said lazily. "You don't happen to know where I can get something to drink, do you?"

"I'll get you some homebrew," said Dasha." I know someone who has some. Only look here, Yasha, remember he's a poor miserable cripple. Don't you go blabbing on him."

The agronomist came into the yard, and the women whispered among themselves:

"Take a look at that! You'd think it was Easter Sunday!"

Koryako walked over to Yashka, whispered something into his ear, and they both burst out laughing. Then they walked off to the agronomist's and had a drink there. Mikhailyuchka brought them fat back and pickled tomatoes.

Varvara Andreyevna, whose five sons were all in the Red Army, a woman with the wickedest and most biting tongue in the whole house, said to her:

"Now you'll be one of the first ladies of the land under the Germans, Mikhailyuchka, with your husband in a concentration camp for anti-Soviet propaganda, your son a deserter, and this house formerly your property. I guess the Germans will be electing you mayor of this town, no less."

The highway ran some five kilometres to the east, and for this reason the German troops passed without entering the little town. Only at noon did some motorcyclists come down the main street, in forage caps, shorts and sandals, black with the sun, every one of them wearing a wrist watch.

Staring at them the old woman said:

"Good heavens! Have they no shame to go riding down the main street naked! What brazenness!"

The motorcyclists searched the yards, swooped down on the priest's turkey, which had come out to scratch in the manure pile, gobbled up two and a half kilograms of honey belonging to the church warden, drank up a pail of milk, and drove on after announcing that the commandant would arrive in an hour or two.

Later in the day two deserter friends joined Yashka. Soon they were all drunk and singing in chorus: "Three tankmen, three jolly pals." Very likely they would have sung German songs, had they known any.

The agronomist walked around the yard and with a sly smirk asked the women:

"Where have all our Jews got to? All day long there hasn't been a brat or an old man in sight, not a soul, just as if they didn't

exist at all. Yet only yesterday they were hauling such heaps of stuff from the market."

The women shrugged their shoulders and did not encourage this conversation. The agronomist was surprised. He had been sure that the women would react quite differently.

Then the drunken Yashka decided to clear out his apartment, for prior to 1936 the whole ground floor had been occupied by the Mikhailyuks. After his father had been exiled, two rooms were occupied by Voronenko and his wife, and during the war the town Soviet had put Second Lieutenant Weisman's family into the third room when they had evacuated from Zhitomir.

Yashka's friends helped him. Katya Weisman and Vitya Voronenko were sitting in the yard and crying. Missis Weisman was carrying out dishes and pots and pans. As she passed by the weeping children she whispered to them:

"Hush, children, hush. Don't cry."

But her sweating face with the grey strands of hair plastered to her temples and cheeks looked so terrifying that the sight of her frightened the children more than ever and they bawled even louder.

Dasha reminded Yashka of their morning conversation, but he only said to her.

"You can't buy me with a bottle of liquor! You think people have forgotten that your Vitka took a hand in settling scores with the kulaks."

Lida Weisman, the widow of the Second Lieutenant, who had not been herself since that terrible day she had received news that both her husband and her brother had been listed as killed, looked at the weeping little girl and said:

"There isn't a drop of milk on the market today. Whether you cry or not there's no milk."

But Victor Voronenko smiled as he lay on an empty sack tapping away on the ground with his crutch.

Old Missis Mikhailyuk came out; she stood there, tall, grey-haired, her eyes blazing, without saying a word. She looked at the weeping children, at her bustling son, at old Missis Weisman, at the smiling legless man.

"Mama, what are you standing there for like a statue?" Yashka asked. He had to repeat his question three times before she answered:

"So we've lived to see the day," she said slowly.

Until evening the evicted people sat silently on their bundles but when it began to grow dark, Boris Isaacovich came out and said:

"I want all of you to please come and stay with me."

The women, who had been sitting there motionless, immediately burst into tears.

Picking up two of the bundles, Boris Isaacovich walked off to his house. The room was piled with bundles, pots and pans, suitcases, tied up with bits of wire and rope. The children fell asleep on the bed, the women on the floor, while Boris Isaacovich and Voronenko spoke in whispers.

"I wanted a great deal from life," said Victor Voronenko. "At one time I wanted the Order of Lenin, at another I wanted a motorcycle with a sidecar so that I could ride down to the Don with my wife on Sundays. When I was at the front I dreamed of seeing my family, of bringing back a German iron cross to my son, but now there's only one thing I want and that's a grenade. I'd know what to do with it!"

But the old schoolmaster said:

"The more you think of life the less you understand it. Soon I'll stop thinking altogether, but that'll happen when they blow my brains out. As long as the German tanks will not be able to stop me from thinking, I'll think about the world."

"What's the use of thinking?" said Voronenko. "A hand grenade, that's something. To make more trouble for Hitler, as long as I'm alive!"

II

KORYAKO, the agronomist, was waiting to see the commandant of the town. They said that the commandant was an elderly man who knew Russian. Somehow or other word got round that way back he had attended a Riga grammar school. The commandant had already been informed of Koryako's arrival and the latter nervously paced the waiting room, glancing at the enormous portrait of Hitler shown talking to a group of children. There was a smile on Hitler's face, and the children, obviously dressed up for the occasion, were looking up at him, their little faces serious and tense. Koryako was nervous. After all he had once drawn up a plan for the collectivization of the district; what if the Germans got wind of it? He was nervous

because he was about to talk to fascists for the first time in his life. He was nervous also because he was on the premises of the agricultural school, where he had taught agronomy a year ago. He realized that he was taking a decisive step and could never go back to his former life. And he kept suppressing the uneasiness in his soul by repeating one sentence over and over again.

"You have to play trumps, you have to play trumps."

Suddenly a tormented, muffled cry came from the commandant's office.

Koryako backed towards the exit.

"Christ, I shouldn't have budged," he thought with sudden alarm. "Maybe if I lay low nobody would bother me."

The door of the commandant's office flew open and the chief of police, recently arrived from Vinnitsa, and the commandant's young adjutant, who rounded up partisans on market days, came running out. The adjutant shouted something to the clerk in German and the latter sprang up and seized the receiver. On catching sight of Koryako, the chief of police cried out:

"Quick, quick! A doctor! Where can we find a doctor! The commandant's had a heart attack."

"There's a doctor in the house just across the street. He's the best doctor in town," said Koryako pointing through the window. "Only you see, his name is Weintraub—he's a Jew!"

"*Was? Was?*" asked the adjutant.

The chief of police who had already picked up a little German, said:

"*Hier ist ein guter Doktor, aber er ist Jude.*"

The adjutant waved his hand, and rushed to the door. Koryako ran after him showing him the way.

Major Werner had had a bad attack of angina pectoris. The doctor realized this at once after he had asked the adjutant a few questions. He ran into the next room, hastily embraced his wife and daughter, snatched up his syringe and a few ampules of camphor and hurried after the young officer.

"Just a minute . . . I must put on the arm band," said Weintraub.

"Never mind, come as you are," muttered the adjutant.

As they entered the commandant's office, the young officer said to Weintraub:

"I must warn you that our own doctor will be here soon. We've

sent a car for him. He will check up on your medicines and treatment."

With a wry smile Weintraub said:

"Young man, you're dealing with a doctor, but if you do not trust me, I can leave."

"Hurry up, hurry up!" shouted the adjutant.

Werner, a thin, grey-haired man, was lying on the couch his pale face covered with perspiration. His eyes, filled with the anguish of death, were terrible to behold. Slowly he said:

"Doctor, for the sake of my poor mother and sick wife...." And he held out his weak hand with bloodless fingernails to Weintraub.

The clerk and the adjutant groaned in chorus.

"To think of his mother at such a moment!" whispered the clerk reverently.

"Doctor, I'm choking ... save me...." gasped the commandant, his eyes pleading for help.

And the doctor saved him.

The joyous sensation of life returned to Werner. The valves of his heart, no longer gripped by spasms, sent his blood coursing freely through his veins and his breathing became easy. As Weintraub turned to leave, Werner seized his hand.

"No, no, don't, don't go. I'm afraid it might happen again."

"It's a terrible sickness," he complained in a low voice. "This is the fourth attack I've had. Every time I get an attack I realize all the horror of death. There is nothing more horrible, nothing blacker, nothing more terrifying than death. How unjust it is that we are mortals! Don't you think so?"

They were alone in the room.

Weintraub bent over the commandant and impelled by some irresistible force, said:

"I'm a Jew, Herr Major. You are right, death is horrible."

For a second their eyes met. And the grey-haired physician saw confusion in the commandant's eyes. The German depended on him. He was afraid of a new attack, and the old doctor with his calm confident movements, was protecting him from death, standing between him and that horrible shadow that had been so close, at his very side, that dwelt constantly in the sclerotic heart of the major.

The sound of an approaching car broke the spell. The adjutant came in

"Herr Major," he said, "the head doctor from the therapeutic hospital has arrived. We can let this man go now."

The old man went out. As he passed the doctor with the iron cross on his uniform who was waiting in the outside office, he said with a smile:

"How do you do, colleague. The patient is quite all right now."

The German doctor stared at him silently without stirring a muscle.

As Weintraub walked home he muttered to himself:

"There's only one thing I want now, to be shot by a patrol right in front of the window in sight of the commandant. That's my only wish now. Don't walk around without your band, don't walk around without your band."

He laughed aloud and waved his hands as though he were drunk.

His wife ran out to meet him.

"Well, how was it? Was everything all right?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes, yes, our dear commandant is out of danger," he said smiling. But as he entered the room he suddenly fell and burst into tears, knocking his large bald head against the floor.

"He was right, Boris Isaacovich was right," he said. "Cursed be the day when I became a doctor."

Thus the days passed. The agronomist was put in charge of the neighbourhood, Yashka served in the police and the prettiest girl in the town, Marusya Varaponova, played the piano in the officer's café and lived with the commandant's adjutant. The women made trips into the countryside to exchange clothing for flour, potatoes and millet, cursing the German truck drivers who demanded huge fees for transportation. The labour exchange sent out hundreds of notifications and young men and women carrying bundles kept pouring into the railway station and climbing into the box cars. A German moving picture house, and a soldiers' and officers' brothel were opened and on the main square a large brick lavatory was built with an inscription in Russian and Italian: "For Germans only."

In school Clara Franzevna, the school-teacher, gave the first graders the following problem to solve: "Two Messerschmitts brought down eight Red fighters and twelve bombers while the anti-aircraft gun destroyed eleven Bolshevik attack planes. How many Red aero-

planes were destroyed in all?" The other teachers were afraid to say anything in front of Clara Franzevna and waited until she left the teachers' room. Prisoners were driven through town; they shuffled along, tattered, reeling with hunger and fatigue, and the women ran out to them with bread and boiled potatoes. The prisoners seemed to have lost all semblance to human beings, so tortured were they by hunger, thirst and lice. The faces of some of the men were swollen while in others, on the contrary, the cheeks had fallen in and were covered with filthy dark stubble. But in spite of their sufferings, they bore their cross bravely and looked with hatred at the well-fed, well-dressed policemen and at the traitors in German uniform from the *Nationale Freiwilligen Battalione*. So great was their hatred that had they the choice their hands would have reached out more eagerly for the throat of a traitor than for a fresh, steaming loaf of bread. Every morning crowds of women escorted by soldiers and police, were marched to work at the aerodromes, to build bridges and repair the railway tracks and embankments. Past them sped trainloads of tanks and shells, coming from the West, while from the East heading westward went trainloads of wheat, cattle and box cars packed with men and women.

The women and old folks and even the little children all understood perfectly well what was going on, they knew what fate the Germans had in store for them and why this terrible war was being fought.

Once old Varvara Andreyevna went over to Boris Isaacovich in the yard and asked with tears in her eyes:

"What has happened to this world of ours?"

The teacher replied:

"Most likely in a day or two the Germans will begin to massacre the Jews. The life to which they have doomed the Ukraine is too terrible."

"What have the Jews got to do with it?" asked Voronenko.

"Why, that's one of their basic principles," replied the schoolmaster. "The fascists have turned Europe into a huge forced labour camp and in order to keep the prisoners in subjection they have built a vast ladder of oppression. The Dutch live worse than the Danes, the French worse than the Dutch, the Czechs worse than the French. It's still worse for the Greeks and Serbs, then come the Poles, and still lower the Ukrainians, the Russians. These are all rungs on

the forced labour ladder. The lower you go the more blood, slavery and sweat. Well, and at the very bottom of this huge many-storeyed forced labour prison is the chasm to which the fascists have doomed the Jews. Their fate is to terrify the whole huge European forced labour camp, so that the most terrible lot would seem a blessing in comparison with the lot of the Jews. Now it seems to me that the sufferings of the Russians and the Ukrainians are so great that the time at last has come to show that there is a fate more frightful, more horrible. They will say: 'Don't complain, be happy, proud, glad that you are not Jews!' It is the simple arithmetic of brutality and not elemental hatred."

III

THAT MONTH many changes took place in the house where Boris Isaacovich lived. The agronomist became tremendously important and much stouter. Women came to him with requests, brought him homebrew and every evening he would get drunk, play the gramophone and sing: "My campfire is gleaming in the fog." German words began to crop up in his conversation. He would say: "When I go *nach hous* or to *spatzir*, I would ask you not to bother me with requests." Yashka Mikhailyuk was rarely to be seen at home; he was touring the district tracking down partisans. He usually came home with a peasant cart, loaded with fat back, homebrew and eggs. His mother, who adored him, cooked sumptuous meals for her darling. Once he brought a non-com from the Gestapo home to supper.

"That should be a lesson to you, you fool," old lady Mikhailyuk taunted Dasha Voronenko. "You see what important visitors we have, while you're living with your one-legged cripple in that Jew's room."

She had never forgiven the pretty Dasha for having refused her son in 1936 and married Voronenko instead.

"You'll soon have plenty of space to live in," mocked Yashka with an air of mystery, "I've seen towns where everything has been cleaned out . . . to the last crumb."

Dasha repeated these words at home. Old lady Weisman began to weep over her granddaughter.

"Dasha," she said, "I shall leave you my wedding ring. Then there will be about fifteen poods of potatoes from our garden, and

some pumpkins and beets. That will keep the child fed somehow until spring. Then I have a length of woollen cloth for a lady's coat. You can exchange it for flour. You see, she's just a little thing and she doesn't eat much."

"She'll be all right with us," replied Dasha, "and when she grows up she'll marry our Vitya."

That day Dr. Weintraub came to visit Boris Isaacovich. He handed the schoolmaster a small phial corked with a glass stopper.

"It's a concentrated solution," he said. "My views have changed and in the last few days I've begun to regard this as an essential and useful medicine."

Boris Isaacovich shook his head slowly.

"Thank you," he said sadly, "but my views have changed too lately. I've decided not to resort to this medicine."

"Why?" asked Weintraub in amazement. "I've had enough. You were right, and not I. I have no right to walk down the main street; my wife is forbidden to go to the market on pain of shooting; we must all wear this band. When I go out into the street with it I feel as if a heavy bracelet of red-hot steel were searing my arm. It's impossible to live like this. You were quite right. It seems we're not even worthy of penal servitude in Germany. I suppose you've heard how the unfortunate young men and women are working there. But they don't take Jewish young people there, which means that something much worse than penal servitude is in store for our young people, and all of us. What that will be, I do not know. Why should I wait for it? You are right. I would have gone and joined the partisans, but with my bronchial asthma it is out of the question."

"As for me," said Boris Isaacovich, "I've become an optimist during these frightful weeks that have intervened since we last met."

"What?" asked Weintraub, horrified. "An optimist? You'll pardon me, but I fear you have taken leave of your senses. Do you know what these people are like? This morning I went to the commandant's office just to ask that my daughter be released from work for one day after the terrible beating she had and they threw me out. Thank heaven they did not do worse."

"That's not what I meant," said Boris Isaacovich. "There was one thing that I dreaded more than anything else; I would break out in a cold sweat at the mere thought of it. Do you know what it

was? I feared that the fascists would prove right in what they counted on. I've already spoken about this to Voronenko. I was afraid, terrified, and did not want to live to see the day. Why do you think the fascists undertook this wholesale baiting and extermination of so many millions of people? There is a definite purpose behind it all—a cold deliberate plan. They are out to invoke the powers of darkness, to inflame hatred, arouse prejudices. Therein lies their strength. Divide and rule is their motto! Bring to life all that is evil. Incite each nation against its neighbour, the enslaved nations against the nations that still retain their liberty, those living on the other side of the ocean against those living on this side, and all the peoples of the world against the Jewish people. Divide and rule! And there is much evil and cruelty, superstition and prejudice in the world! But they were mistaken. They meant to unleash hatred, but sympathy was born. They sought to call forth malice, cruelty, to befuddle the intelligence of the great nations. But I have seen with my own eyes that the horrible fate of the Jews has aroused the compassion and sympathy of the Russians and the Ukrainians who, feeling the whiplash of German terror themselves, are ready to help in any way they can. We are forbidden to buy bread or to go to the market for milk, but our neighbours volunteer to shop for us. Dozens of people have come to me telling me how best to hide and where I would be in least danger. Yes, I see much sympathy. True, I see indifference too. But malicious joy at our downfall is something that I have not often seen, no more than three or four times. The Germans were mistaken. They miscalculated. My optimism is justified. I have never had any illusions. I have always known that life is cruel."

"That's all very true," said Weintraub, glancing at his watch, "but I must be going: the Jewish day is drawing to a close; it's half-past three.... Most likely we won't be seeing each other any more."

He walked over to Boris Isaacovich.

"Let me say goodbye," he said, "after all, we've known each other for nearly fifty years, it's not for me to preach to you at such a time."

They embraced and kissed. Watching them the women wept.

Many things happened that day. The day before Voronenko had managed to get two hand grenades from some boy. He had exchanged a tumbler of beans and two tumblers of sunflower seeds for them.

"What do I care," he said to Boris Isaacovich as he stood under

a tree and watched his son Vitya teasing little Katya Weisman. "What's it to me? I came home wounded, but what pleasure did I get out of it? And how I yearned for home all those months in the trenches and in the hospital. First, the German occupation, that savagery of theirs—the labour exchange, forced labour in Germany, starvation, vileness, the ugly mugs of the Germans and their police, the treachery of those damned traitors."

He paused to shout to his son in anger:

"What are you doing to that kid, you fascist, you? You'll break all her bones. What are you thinking of! Her father died fighting for our country and received the Order of Lenin after his death, and you think you can go around beating her like that from morning till night? And look at that child standing there like a sheep, gaping and not even crying. If only she'd run away from the fool, but she just stands and lets him get away with it...."

No one saw him leave the house, his crutches tapping on the pavement. He stood at the corner for a while, staring at the house where he had left his wife and son, then limped off toward the commandant's. He never saw his wife or son again. The agronomist too never returned home. The grenade thrown by the one-legged lieutenant went through the window of the commandant's waiting room, where the street wardens were awaiting orders. The commandant was not there at the time. He was taking a stroll in the garden, as the doctor with the iron cross had advised him to do. Every day he took a forty minute walk through the orchard and a brief rest on a bench.

In the morning a policeman ordered demented Lida Weisman to remove the bodies of Dr. Weintraub, his wife and daughter, who had poisoned themselves during the night. The Germans set up a guard so that no one should touch the doctor's property but themselves. Even Dr. Ageyev, who asked for the Big Medical Encyclopædia explaining heatedly that it was absolutely of no use to the Germans since it was written in Russian, was turned away.

The bodies were taken through all the streets.... The bony nag stopped at every corner, as if its lifeless passengers kept asking it to stop so that they could take a last look at the boarded-up houses, at the blue and yellow windowpanes on the sun porch of Lyubimenko's house, at the watchtower. From windows, gates and doorways his patients followed the doctor's last journey. No one wept, no one removed his hat or bowed in reverential tribute to the doctor's

remains. In these ghastly times people were indifferent to blood, suffering and death; kindness and compassion alone shook them out of their torpor. The town did not need a doctor. Good health was a curse. Hemorrhages, paralysis, hernia, fatal heart disease, malignant tumours saved people from exhausting labour, from German penal servitude. And people longed for sickness, provoked ailments, prayed to be stricken with disease. They watched the dead doctor pass in heavy silence. Old lady Weisman alone burst into tears when the cart passed her house, because when the doctor had come to take leave of Boris Isaacovich the evening before he had brought a kilogram of rice, a bag of cocoa and twelve lumps of sugar for little Katya. He had been a good doctor, Dr. Weintraub, but he had not cared to treat people free of charge. And he had never been known to make anyone such a rich gift before.

Lida Weisman got home in the evening.

She said that the doctor and his wife had been heavy, that the ground had been rocky and hard, but fortunately the German had allowed her to dig a shallow grave. She complained that she had broken a heel of her shoe with her shovel and torn her skirt on a nail in climbing off the cart. She had enough sense—or perhaps it was the slyness of the insane—not to tell Dasha that she had seen Victor Voronenko hanging just beyond the city limits.

But when Dasha went out of the room she said in a low business-like voice:

"Victor is hanging out there. Looks terribly thirsty. His mouth is wide open and his lips are all parched."

Before night fell Dasha had learned of Victor's fate from old lady Mikhailyuk. She stumbled blindly to the back of the yard where the cucumbers grew and dropped down between the rows. At first the little boys playing there thought she might be trying to steal from the garden and kept an eye on her, but when they saw that she just sat there lost in thought they went on with their play. Gnawing at her lips she gave free rein to the fearsome thoughts that tormented her.

She recalled the first day of her life with Victor, and the last day; she recalled the army surgeon and the sweet coffee that she had made for the doctor and drank with him, listening to gramophone records. She remembered how her husband had whispered to her in the night:

"Doesn't it make you sick to lie with a one-legged cripple?" And her reply: "It can't be helped." She had hurt him sorely, and she wanted to run away from people. But the world had become cruel and there was no one to feel for her. She had to get up from the ground and go among people again. It was her turn that evening to bring water from the well.

A German soldier who lived in the next house ran by on his way to the outhouse, pulling off his belt as he ran. On his way back he caught sight of Dasha sitting there and walked over to the fence. He stood there silently admiring her comeliness, her soft white neck, her hair, her breasts. She could feel his look and thought: am I not wretched enough that God should punish me by making me beautiful besides? For how could a woman be comely and live a pure life in this wicked, terrible time.

Presently Boris Isaacovich came up to her and said:

"Dasha, you want to be alone; I'll carry the water for you and you stay here as long as you wish. I gave Vitya some porridge."

She stared at him, nodded mutely and a sobbing sigh shook her. He was perhaps the only one in town that had not changed in the least, he had remained exactly as he had always been, polite, considerate, kind, reading his books and asking: "I'm not disturbing you, am I?" the only one who still said: "God bless you" when you sneezed. And it was just this politeness, gentleness and consideration that she missed so much in the others. It seemed that this old man was the only one in the town who greeted you when he met you, asked how you were, remarked on your appearance and urged you to take care of yourself if you were looking out of sorts. Everyone else seemed to have fallen into a state of apathy, to have given everything up for lost. She too lived in the same slovenly fashion.

She dug absently in the ground with a little twig between the cucumber vines, painstakingly filling in the little holes and levelling them again. And when it was already quite dark she wept a little. Then she felt a little better. She wanted to eat, to drink tea and to go over to mad Lida Weisman and tell her: "We are both of us widows now, you and I." And then she would go to a nunnery.

At twilight Boris Isaacovich put two candlesticks on the table and took from the cupboard two candles wrapped separately in blue paper. He had been saving them for a long time. He lit both candles. He opened a drawer that he had never opened before, took out a

packet of old letters and photographs, and sitting down at the table put on his glasses and began to read the letters that were written on blue and pink paper, faded with time. Then he gazed at the photographs long and closely. Old lady Weisman went softly over to him.

"What will become of my children?" she asked.

She did not know how to write. In all her life she had not read a single book. She was an ignorant old woman but in place of book learning she had developed the faculty for observation and possessed a good deal of common sense.

"How long do you think those candles will last?" she asked.

"They ought to do for two nights," said Boris Isaacovich.

"Today and tomorrow?"

"Yes," he answered, "for tomorrow evening too."

"And the day after tomorrow it will be dark?"

"Yes, I think it will be dark the day after tomorrow."

She had little faith in her fellow men. But Boris Isaacovich inspired confidence and she believed him. A terrible sorrow welled up in her heart as she gazed at the face of her sleeping granddaughter.

"Tell me," she said at last. "What have the children done that they should be made to suffer?"

But Boris Isaacovich did not hear her. He was reading the old letters. That night he dug into the vast accumulation of his memories. He recalled hundreds of people who had passed through his life, his pupils and his teachers, his enemies and his friends; he remembered books and the heated debates of his student days; the cruel, unhappy love affair of sixty years ago that had laid a cold shadow over his whole life; he remembered his years of wandering and his years of work, remembered his spiritual wavering—from passionate, almost fanatical religiousness to a cold, clearheaded atheism; remembered the heated, fanatical, irreconcilable arguments. All this was done with years ago. Naturally, of course, his life had not been a successful one. He had thought much but accomplished little. For fifty years he had been a schoolmaster in a small, dull little town. At one time he had taught children in a Jewish trade school; then after the revolution, he had taught algebra and geometry in high school. He ought to have lived in a big city, written books, contributed to the newspapers, engaged in polemics with the whole world.

Yet tonight he was not sorry that his life had not been a success. That night, for the first time he felt indifferent to the people that had long since left his life; he wanted passionately but one thing—a miracle, which he himself could not understand—love. He had not known love. He had lost his mother at an early age and had been brought up by his uncle, and in his youth he had known the anguish of a woman's betrayal. He had lived his whole life in a world of exalted ideas and sensible actions.

He wanted someone to come up to him and say: "Throw a shawl over your legs, there's a draught from the floor and that's bad for your rheumatism." He wanted someone to say to him: "Why did you carry water from the well today when you have sclerosis?" He longed for one of the women lying on the floor to come up to him and say. "Go to sleep. You oughtn't to be sitting up so late at night." No one had ever come over to his bed and tucked him in, no one had ever said to him: "There, now you'll be warmer; take my blanket as well." He knew that he would have to die at a time when the laws of evil, of brute force, in whose name fearful crimes were committed, prevailed, determining the actions not only of the victors but of those who came under their sway. Apathy and indifference were life's worst enemies. In these terrible days fate had decreed that he must die.

In the morning an announcement appeared ordering all Jews living in the town to report the next day at six in the morning on the square near the mill. They were all to be shipped to the western areas of occupied Ukraine where the Reich authorities had set up a special ghetto. They were ordered to take no more than fifteen kilograms of baggage with them. There would be no need to take food as the military authorities would supply them with food and hot water en route.

IV

ALL DAY long neighbours flocked to Boris Isaacovich to ask him what he thought of the order. Came Boruch, the old shoemaker, a foul-mouthed wit, but an expert at making ladies' fancy footwear; came Mendel, the stove-maker, a taciturn philosopher; came tinsmith Leib, the father of nine, and broad-shouldered grey-whiskered worker Heim Kulish. They had all heard of similar orders being issued in other towns but no one had ever seen a single trainload of Jews

or met a column of them on distant roads, or received news of life in these ghettos. They had all heard that the Jews were not taken to the railway stations or along the broad highways but to those places outside the towns where there were pits and ravines, swamps and abandoned quarries. They had all heard that a few days after the Jews left, the German soldiers would begin trading on the market, exchanging women's blouses, children's sweaters and shoes for honey, cream and eggs; that people returning from the market would whisper to one another: "I saw a German exchange the woollen sweater my neighbour Sonya wore the morning they were taken out of town." "I saw a German trade the sandals that the little boy who was evacuated from Riga was wearing." "I saw a German ask for three kilos of honey in exchange for a suit belonging to our engineer Kugel." They knew, or rather guessed, what was in store for them. But in their heart of hearts they did not believe it, for the massacre of a nation seemed incredible. To wipe out a whole people. No one could believe it.

Old Boruch said:

"How can anyone kill a man who makes such beautiful shoes as I do? Why you wouldn't blush to send them to the Paris Fair!"

"They can do it," said Mendel, the stove-maker.

"All right," said Leib, the tinsmith. "Let's say they don't need my kettles, pans, samovar chimneys. But that's no reason why they should go and kill my nine children, is it?"

The old schoolmaster said nothing. Listening to them he reflected that it was a good thing he had not taken poison. He had lived with these people all his life, and with them he would live his last bitter hour.

"We ought to run away to the woods, but there's nowhere to run to," said Kulish, the worker. "The police are on our heels and the street warden has been at my house three times already this morning. I sent my little boy to my father-in-law's, and the house proprietor went right after him. He's a good fellow, he said to me straight out: 'The police warned me that if even one boy fails to show up tomorrow, I'll answer with my head!' "

"That's the way it is," said Mendel. "It's fate. My neighbour said to my son: 'Yashka, you don't look like a Jew at all; you run away to the village.' And my Yashka said to her: 'I want to look like a Jew; I'll go wherever my father is taken.' "

"There's one thing I can say," muttered Kulish, "if it comes to that, I won't die like a sheep."

"Good for you, Kulish!" Boris Isaacovich spoke up finally. "Well said, man!"

That evening Major Werner had a conference with Becker, representative of the Gestapo.

"If only we carry off tomorrow's operation properly, we'll be able to breathe freely," said Becker. "I've had enough of these Jews. Excesses every day: five ran away, joined the partisans, I am told; one family committed suicide; three were caught walking around without arm bands; a Jewish woman was recognized on the market buying eggs, although Jews have been categorically forbidden to appear in the market place; two were arrested on Berliner Strasse, although they knew perfectly well that they are forbidden to walk on the main street; eight of them were wandering around town after four in the afternoon; two girls tried to hide in the woods on their way to work and were shot. All these are trifles of course, I realize that our men at the front have bigger things to contend with, nevertheless nerves are nerves. After all, these are the events of a single day, and it's the same every day."

"What are the arrangements for the operation?" asked Werner.

Becker polished his pince-nez.

"The arrangements were not made by us. In Poland, of course, we had much greater opportunities, there we could apply electricity. As a matter of fact it's hardly possible to do without it; after all, it's a matter of statistics with a respectable number of zeros. Here, of course, we have to operate in field conditions. The proximity of the front makes itself felt. The latest instructions allow us to deviate from the regulations and adapt ourselves to local conditions."

"How many men will you need?" asked Werner.

Throughout the conversation Becker's manner had been unusually pompous. And the commandant himself felt quite nervous as he spoke to him.

"Here's how we're arranging it," said Becker. "Two groups—the firing squad and the guards. The firing squad—fifteen to twenty men must be volunteers only. The guard can be comparatively small, say, one man to fifteen Jews."

"Why so?" asked the commandant.

"Experience has shown that when the column is marched past the

railway line and the highway, panic sets in and many try to run away. Besides, it has been forbidden to use machine guns lately as the percentage of fatal hits is small. Orders are to fire with small arms. This delays the work badly. It is also advisable to keep the firing squad as small as possible—no more than twenty men to a thousand Jews. While the work is going on, the guards have plenty to do too. You yourself know that the percentage of men among the Jews is quite considerable."

"How much time should it take?" asked Werner.

"Given efficient organization it shouldn't take more than two and a half hours to handle a thousand. The most important thing is to distribute the functions correctly, to break up and prepare the groups, to have them brought up in time.... The actual operation does not take long."

"Still you have not told me how many men you will need."

"Not less than a hundred," said Becker firmly.

He glanced at the window and added:

"The weather has to be taken into account too. I asked the meteorologist and he said that tomorrow mild sunny weather was expected during the first half of the day with possible rain towards evening. But that's not important for us."

"Consequently...." said Werner hesitatingly.

"The arrangements are as follows. The officer you pick must, of course, be a member of the Nazi party. Here's how the firing squad is to be made up. Tonight at the barracks the officer should ask for a few men with strong nerves who would be willing to undertake a delicate assignment. At least thirty such volunteers should be included in the list. Experience has shown that about ten percent usually drops out. After that the officer should have a talk with each man separately and ask him whether he is not afraid of the sight of blood, and whether he is capable of standing a great nervous strain. No further explanation need be made that evening. At the same time the guards should be selected in a similar manner and the non-coms instructed right away. Arms should be looked over. At five in the morning the squads wearing helmets report for duty, in front of the office. An officer briefs them in detail making sure to talk to the volunteers again. After that three hundred cartridges are issued to each man. At about six they reach the square where the Jews are to gather. They are to march to their destination as follows: the firing squad some thirty

metres in front of the column. Behind the column are to follow two carts as there is always a certain number of aged, pregnant and hysterical women who lose consciousness en route." He spoke slowly so that the major should not miss any of the details.

"Well, I believe that's all. Further instructions will be given on the spot."

Major Werner stared at Becker.

"Well, and how about the children?" he blurted out suddenly.

Becker coughed uncomfortably. This question exceeded the bounds of the business in hand.

"You see," he said sternly looking the commandant straight in the eye, "although it is recommended to separate them from their mothers and attend to them separately, I prefer not to do that. I'm sure you understand how difficult it is to tear a child away from its mother at such a moment."

When Becker had gone, the commandant sent for his adjutant and gave him detailed instructions.

"All the same," he said in a low voice, "I'm glad that the old doctor committed suicide beforehand: my conscience would bother me. After all, he did help me a great deal. I don't know whether I would have lasted till our own doctor came if not for him. And lately I have been feeling fine. I sleep much better and my digestion has improved. I've been told that my colour is much better too. Maybe it's those walks in the orchard I take every day. Yes, the air in this town is superb. They say that there were sanatoriums for lung and heart patients here before the war."

And the sky was blue, the sun shone, and the birds sang.

When the column of Jews passed the railway track and turned off the highway in the direction of the ravine, Heim Kulish drew a deep breath and cried out in Yiddish so that his voice could be heard: "Oi, folks, this is the end!"

And with that he drove his fist into the temple of the soldier marching beside him, knocking him over and tearing the tommy gun from his hand. He had no time to understand the workings of this strange, unfamiliar weapon and so he swung the heavy rifle about him wildly like a hammer, hitting a non-com who had come running up, in the face. In the resulting confusion little Katya Weisman lost

her mother and grandmother and seized hold of Boris Isaacovich's coat tail. With difficulty he picked her up in his arms, and putting his lips to her ear, whispered:

"Don't cry, little one, don't cry."

"I'm not crying, teacher," she said twining her arms around his neck.

She was heavy for him. His head swam, there was a ringing in his ears and his legs trembled from the strain of the long walk and the excruciating tension of the last few hours.

The people drew back from the ravine; some stood rooted to the spot; some fell and crawled on all fours. Boris Isaacovich soon found himself in the front ranks.

Fifteen jews were led to the ravine. Boris Isaacovich knew some of them. Mendel, the taciturn stove-maker; Meyerovich, the dental surgeon; Applefeld, an electrician, and a jovial old gossip. His son had taught in the Kiev Conservatory and had once taken lessons in mathematics from Boris Isaacovich. Breathing heavily, the old man still carried the little girl in his arms. The thought of her drove him to distraction.

"How can I comfort her, how can I deceive her?" he thought, and anguish choked him. At this last moment of his life there was no one to lean on for support, no one to say a word to him, the word he had longed to hear all his life, more than all the wisdom of the greatest thinkers and doers among mankind.

The little girl turned to him. Her face was calm, the pale face of an adult, turned to him in sympathy and compassion. In the sudden silence that had fallen he heard her say:

"Teacher," she said, "don't look that way, you'll be scared." And like a mother she covered his eyes with her hands.

The Gestapo chief had made a mistake. He did not get the chance to breathe freely after the shooting of the Jews. In the evening he received a report that a large armed detachment had appeared near the town, led by Shevchenko, the chief engineer of the sugar refinery. One hundred and forty workers from the factory who had not managed to leave had gone off to the partisans with the engineer. That night the steam mill that had worked for the German quartermaster service was blown up. Beyond the railway station the partisans set fire to huge supplies of hay that had been laid in by the foragers of the Hungarian Cavalry Division. The townsfolk did not sleep all night,

The wind was blowing in the direction of the town and the fire might spread to their houses and barns. The heavy, brick-red flames flickered and crawled, black smoke veiled the stars and the moon, and the warm cloudless summer sky was lurid and menacing.

People stood in their yards and silently watched the huge conflagration spreading. The wind carried with it the rattle of machine-gun bursts and several blasts of hand grenades.

That evening Yashka Mikhailyuk came running home without his cap. He brought neither fat back nor homebrew. Passing by the women who stood silently in the yard, Yashka said to Dasha:

"Well, so you see I was right. Now you've got plenty of space to live in—a whole room to yourself."

"Plenty of room," said Dasha, "plenty of room! They laid my Victor and the little six-year-old girl and the old schoolmaster in one grave. I wept over all of them. Go away!" she cried in sudden fury. "Don't stare at me with your filthy eyes! I'll stab you with a blunt knife! I'll slash you to ribbons!"

Yashka ran into the room and sat there quietly. When his mother wanted to close the shutters, he said:

"To hell with them! Don't open the door. They're all like maniacs out there liable to scald you with boiling water."

"Yashenka," she said, "you'd better go back into the attic again; your cot's still there and I'll lock you up."

Like dark shadows against the lurid background of the fire the soldiers moved trying to extinguish the flames. They had been summoned urgently to the commandant's office.

Old lady Varvara Andreyevna stood in the middle of the yard, her dishevelled grey hair ruddy in the light of the conflagration.

"What?" she screamed. "They did their business, scared us, did they? See the fire! I'm not afraid of the Fritzes! They murder old people and children! Dashka, the day will come when we'll burn the whole accursed lot of them to cinders!"

Meanwhile the sky grew more and more crimson and to the people standing in the yards it seemed that the dark flames were consuming all the evil and baseness with which the Germans had tried to poison the human soul.

VOLGA—STALINGRAD

IT'S A LONG WAY from Moscow to Stalingrad. We drove along roads that took us through the frontline area, past lovely rivers and green towns. We rode over dusty country lanes and up graded highways—in the dazzling blue of midday, when the stifling dust stands high, and at dawn, when the first rays of the sun light up the blushing rowan berries; we rode at night, when the moon and the stars glittered in the quiet waters of the Krassivaya Mech and golden ripples played over the swift waters of the Don.

We passed through Yasnaya Polyana. Flowers were blooming in chaotic profusion around the manor of the Tolstoy estate and the sun shone through the open windows into the rooms, setting the newly whitewashed walls agleam. Only the barren spots on the ground near the grave where the Germans had buried eighty of their killed and the black traces of a fire on the floor of Tolstoy's house reminded us of the German invasion of Yasnaya Polyana. The manor has been rebuilt; flowers bloom again; and again the austere simplicity of the great writer's grave touches the heart.... The bodies of the enemy dead have been removed from its vicinity and buried in huge craters made by heavy German high-explosive bombs. Swamp grass now grows over these places.

We travel on through the lovely countryside that is in the grip of war. Women are working everywhere, reaping, threshing, guiding their horse-drawn ploughs, driving tractors and harvesters, sitting behind the wheels of trucks and tackling their dangerous and difficult jobs at advanced railroad sidings. They were the first to fight the fire started by the Germans at Yasnaya Polyana manor; it was they who levelled the endless road over which pass tanks, ammunition, and supply trucks. Russian women shouldered the burden of the tremendous harvest—cutting the ears, binding the sheaves, threshing the grain and delivering it to the granaries. Their sunburned hands know no rest from sunrise to sunset. It is they who rule the land just behind the frontline with the help of the youngsters and the old people. The work is not easy for the women. Wiping the sweat from their brows, they help the horses pull heavily-loaded carts out of the sand in which they are stuck fast. They swing axes in the woods, felling great pine trunks; they drive locomotives; man the ferries at river crossings;

carry mail; and work all night long in collective farm, state farm and machine-and-tractor station offices. They spend nights making the rounds of the granaries, guarding the grain. They do not shrink from hard work, and the ominous nights just behind the frontline hold no terrors for them; they gaze calmly at the distant lights of flares as they patrol the village streets.

One night, sixty-year-old Marusya Biryukova went out to stand duty at the granary, armed with an iron-tipped pole. In the morning she said to me with a chuckle:

"It was dark. The moon wasn't up yet. The only light was a searchlight beam moving over the sky. Suddenly I heard somebody steal up to the granary and try the lock. At first I was scared stiff. I thought: What can an old body like me do anyway? But when I thought of how my daughters had toiled and moiled to bring in my sons' harvest, I got bold. I stole up, quiet as a mouse, raised my pole like it was a gun and yelled: 'Halt! Or I'll shoot!' You ought to have seen how they ran! Drove them off from the granary, I did, with my pole."

The Russian woman has assumed the tremendous burden of work in field and factory. But the weight she carries in her heart is heavier than the burden of labour. She does not sleep nights, mourning the loss of her dead husband, son, brother. She waits patiently for a letter from her dear ones who have been reported missing. Her warm, generous heart and unclouded mind help her to live through all the painful setbacks of war. How much grief is there in her words, how keenly she understands the danger that threatens our country; how kind, humane and patient she is!

Our army has much to defend, much to be proud of—the glorious past, the great Revolution, the vast expanse of rich land. But our army should also be proud of the Russian woman—the most splendid woman on earth. The army should remember wife and mother and sister, should fear more than death itself the loss of the Russian woman's respect and love, for there is nothing loftier or more honourable than this love.

I thought a great deal on the way to Stalingrad. The road is a long one. Even the time changes on the way; the clocks here are an hour ahead. The birds are different too—big-headed kites on heavy fluffy legs perched motionlessly on telegraph poles; in the evening grey owls flap clumsily over the road. The noontide sun has become

more merciless. Grass snakes crawl across the road. The steppe too is now different; the luxuriant grass has vanished. The steppe is brown and hot, and overgrown with dusty weeds and wormwood, with sickly, miserable-looking feather grass plastered to the cracked ground. Carts are drawn by oxen, and there a two-humped camel stands in the middle of the steppe. We are drawing closer and closer to the Volga. You can actually feel the vastness of the territory the enemy has captured; a terrible sensation of alarm weighs on your heart and interferes with your breathing. This warfare in the south, this fighting at the lower Volga, this tangible feeling of the enemy knife that has penetrated deep into the body, these camels and the flat parched steppe denoting the proximity of desert—all these arouse a feeling of alarm.

They cannot be permitted to go further. Every step back is a big and perhaps irreparable calamity. The inhabitants of the villages on the Volga feel this strongly, and so do the armies defending the Volga and Stalingrad.

We had our first glimpse of the Volga early in the morning. The river of Russian freedom looked gloomy and sad in this chill windy hour. Dark clouds scurried low over the ground, but the air was clear and the steep white right bank and the sandy steppeland on the other side of the Volga were visible for many miles. The bright waters of the Volga flowed freely between two vast expanses of land, uniting the right and left banks like a mighty metal band. At the high bank the waters were rough, whirling bits of watermelon rind round and round and lapping away at the sifting sandy bank; a wave sighed as it rocked a buoy. Towards noon the wind dispersed the clouds and it became suddenly hot. The Volga glittered under the high sun turning blue; the air over the river was filled with a light bluish haze and the low sandy shore covered with patches of grass stretched serenely away from the river brink. The sight of this most beautiful of rivers evoked feelings both cheerful and dismal. Steamships painted a greenish grey and covered over with wilted branches, were moored at the wharves, a light wisp of smoke scarcely rising over the funnels. They were holding in their noisy, living breath lest the enemy spot them. Trenches, dugouts and anti-tank ditches extend to the very bank everywhere. At the once busy crossings where crowds of carefree people had waited, and cart wheels had creaked under their loads of watermelons and cantaloupes and little boys had sat with their fishing lines, there now stand anti-aircraft guns, two and four-barrelled machine guns;

shelters have been dug, and camouflaged trucks, dispersed here and there, await their turn. The war has reached the Volga. Nowhere did an artillery barrage sound as it does here, over the Volga expanses. The thunder of artillery fire, with no barriers to stop it, is magnified by the echo and booms here with full force, roaring mightily, rising from the ground to the sky and once again falling from the sky to the ground. This solemn roar reminds people that the war has entered its decisive phase, that there must be no more retreating, that the Volga is the main zone of our defences. And every night the old women in the Volga villages tell the same story over and over again about the captured German general who said to his captors: "My orders were as follows: we'll take Stalingrad and then we'll go further beyond the Volga. If we don't take Stalingrad we'll have to fall back to our own border; we shall not be able to hold on in Russia." This is just a story, of course, but in this story, as in all stories emanating from the people, there is more truth than in many so-called facts. And the thought of the Volga and Stalingrad, of the major and deciding battle grips everyone, be it the aged, the women, the fighters in workers' battalions, tankmen, flyers or artillerymen.

The Germans attacked Stalingrad from the air at the end of August. In all the course of the war the Germans have never once dealt such a concentrated and powerful air blow. The enemy made over a thousand raids. They swooped down on the residential section, on the beautiful buildings in the centre of the city, pounded the libraries, the children's infirmary, the hospitals, schools and colleges. A mammoth conflagration spuming forth columns of smoke rose over Stalingrad and spread for more than sixty kilometres along the bank of the Volga. The bombing to which this beautiful Soviet city was subjected was monstrous. The Germans were, of course, fully aware of the fact that all the factories were located in the suburbs of the city. Nevertheless they concentrated their blows on the downtown section.

Simultaneously with the air raid, the enemy pushed towards the Volga, north of the city. A column of tanks followed closely by mobile infantry threatened the vicinity of the Tractor Plant in the northern district of Stalingrad. The enemy blow was repulsed by Lieutenant-Colonel Gorelik's tank-buster unit and Lieutenant-Colonel Herman's ack-acks. Together with them the workers' battalions from the Tractor and Barricades Plants battled the enemy, and excellent gunners. tankmen and mortar-gunners were found among them. Tanks

and guns and mortars rode or were hauled straight from the factories to the field. During that critical night the plants continued to work amidst the roar of explosions and the flames raging around them. The army received many dozens of heavy guns and tanks in the two days of fighting northwest of Stalingrad. The calm courage of the workers, engineers and foremen was superb. Jolly, temperamental Captain Sarkisyan has made a name for himself in the history of this war; he was the first to encounter German tanks with heavy mortars. Lieutenant Skakun's anti-aircraft battery will never be forgotten. Cut off from its regiment, this ack-ack battery fought alone for over twenty-four hours repulsing enemy attacks from the air and ground. Dive bombers attacked it from the air and heavy tanks on the ground. Earth and air, fire and smoke, the iron clangour of exploding bombs, the wailing of shells and clatter of machine-gun bursts fused in one chaos. There were girls in this battery. For twenty-four hours they fought side by side with their fellow gunners. Every time the ack-acks fell silent, the Regimental Commander thought, "They're done for, done for!" And each time the distinct, even volley of ack-ack guns came to his ears again. This terrible battle lasted twenty-four hours. Only in the evening of the next day did the four men who were left in the battery and the wounded commander get to the regiment. They said that during the fighting the girls had never once gone off to the shelter although there were moments when it was impossible not to have gone. And suddenly the thrust of the enemy towards the city was parried. The situation was stabilized.

Thus opened the first page of the Stalingrad epic, a page written with fire and blood, and stamped with the staunchness of our troops, the courage of our workers, their unbounded patriotism. The defence of Tsaritsyn and the defence of Stalingrad. Sanguinary battles are once more being waged in the very same places where the Red troops had defended Tsaritsyn. Once more the names of the villages and hamlets associated with Tsaritsyn's defence are being enumerated in the war bulletins. The troops are marching past the old trenches, long overgrown with grass, that have been described by historians of the Civil War; and no small number of veterans of Red Tsaritsyn's defence—workers, Party members, fishermen and peasants—are volunteering for the defence of Red Stalingrad.

We arrived at Stalingrad soon after an air raid. Smoke was still curling here and there from the fires. A native of Stalingrad, who

arrived together with us, showed us over the charred ruins of his home. "Here's where the nursery was," he told us. "And my library was over there. See where the twisted pipes are? That was where I worked, and my desk stood right here." The bent rods of children's cots are visible beneath a pile of bricks; the clear sky peers indifferently through the scorched gaps in the roof. Our attention is drawn to a sculpture of an eagle topping the building of the Lenin Children's Hospital: one of its wings has been chipped off by a bomb splinter, the other is spread out in flight. The walls and colonnades of the ruined Palace of Physical Culture are coated with a thick layer of soot. Standing out in sharp relief against their velvety blackness are two white statues of nude youths. We walk past fat Persian cats sunning themselves in the windows of empty houses. The green lawns absorb the fresh air through myriads of shattered bits of glass. Schoolboys cluster around the Kholzunov monument gathering bomb and shell splinters. The roseate beauty of the sunset that is visible through hundreds of gaping windows is tinged with sadness in the stillness of the early evening hours. We pass by many buildings with marble memorial tablets bearing the inscriptions: "Stalin spoke here in 1919," "The Headquarters of the Tsaritsyn Defence were housed in this building." Standing in the Central Square is a stone column with the inscription: "From the proletariat of Red Tsaritsyn to the fighters for freedom, who perished in 1919 at the hands of the Wrangel hangmen."

Stalingrad lives and will continue to live. It is impossible to break the will of the people to freedom. Workers' detachments are cleaning the streets, the factory smokestacks are belching forth smoke, while the sky is dotted with the puffs of bursting shells. The people have quickly adapted themselves to war. The barge crossing over to the city with its load of army troops is attacked almost continually by enemy fighters and bombers. All around machine guns are rattling and AA guns are barking, but the sailors just glance up at the sky and bite into their juicy slices of watermelon; the little boys dangle their legs over the edge of the barge and gaze intently at the cork-floats of their fishing rods, and an old woman, sitting on a bench, knits her stocking. Every day sees new workers' detachments set out for the front. Stalingrad has joined the proletarian fortresses of the country: Tula, Leningrad, Moscow. These fortresses are impregnable.

We walk through the gate of a ruined house. Its inhabitants are

eating at tables fashioned out of planks and crates. The children are blowing into their tin plates of steaming cabbage soup. One of our military comrades picks up a half-scorched book. "The Injured and the Insulted," he reads. Then he glances around at the women sitting on their bundles and sighs. A schoolgirl standing nearby, grasps the turn of his thoughts. She snaps out angrily:

"That has nothing to do with us, we are the insulted, not the injured, and we shall never be injured."

At night we stroll through the streets. The air is filled with the roar of engines. Our searchlight beams noiselessly collide with the Germans'. The arrow-straight streets and the empty squares look sombre. The patrolmen's rifles ring against their mess tins as they stride by. Tanks clatter past, the tankmen vigilantly scanning the streets. Detachments of infantry stump heavily over the asphalt road. The faces of the men wear a concentrated, pensive expression. The next morning they are to go into the attack. They are to fight for the Volga, for Stalingrad. The long road we have traversed comes back to the mind: rejuvenated Yasnaya Polyana, majestic and tranquil; the bees droning over Tolstoy's grave; the noble and honest toil of the peasant women on the wide fields behind the frontline; beautiful Mecha in the moonlight; the old women's tales of the captured German who had said: "If we don't take Stalingrad, we shall not be able to hold on in Russia"; the thundering boom of artillery over the Volga; the bronze flyer Kholzunov gazing up at the sky; the sailors on the Volga ferry-boats. It is bitter fighting on the Volga. But no, we must not think only of defence. Here, on the Volga, the fate of our great war for freedom must be settled. Here the Sword of Victory forged in the crucible of severe trials must descend upon the enemy.

More and more troops tramp down the dark streets. The faces of the men are thoughtful. These men will be worthy of the great past of our country, of the Revolution, of those who have fallen defending Red Tsaritsyn from the Whiteguards. These men are worthy of the love of the hard-working Russian woman. They cannot lose her respect.

September 5, 1942
Stalingrad

YOUNG TOMMY-GUNNERS

WHEN EVENING came they lay in a gully and cursed the Sergeant-Major. Most of the tommy-gunners took off their boots and ruefully examined sore feet. Their necks ached from the rifle straps. Some of the men did a bit of washing in the stream that flowed at the bottom of the gully and the clear water soon turned a muddy brown from the filthy footrags. The washing was hung up to dry on the branches of the wild pear and cherry trees and the men fingered aching toes and sighed.

"A march like that is tough on the feet."

Lazarev, a stoop-shouldered lad whose soft fair hair, badly in need of the barber's scissors, was plastered to his hollow cheeks and neck, said angrily:

"I told the Sergeant-Major these boots were tight but he said they'd loosen up after a while. Loosen up, my.... Look what they've done to my feet."

"It's all right for him riding along like a lord on the field kitchen while we hoof it," remarked Romanov, a dark-eyed, dark-haired lad from Gorky. He raised his bare foot and blew gently on the burning, inflamed skin.

"This blasted dust and sun, there's no end to it," said Petrenko. "Oh, for the shady gardens of the Ukraine!"

Lazarev laughed.

"Don't you go cursing the steppes," he said, "Zheldubayev won't let anyone insult his steppes."

Zheldubayev, a Kazakh, was Lazarev's buddy. They had taken a liking to each other in training camp and had had some pleasant chats together in the quiet hour after drill, and on long marches under the blazing pitiless steppe sun, kicking up a cloud of dust so thick that you couldn't see the man marching beside you. One could imagine Lazarev shouting to his pal through the dust:

"Hey, Zheldubayev, are you there? Can't see a damn thing!"

By the time the march was over, their faces wore the same greyish hue although Zheldubayev had the darkest and Lazarev the fairest skin in the company. The sun could not tan Lazarev's skin and his high forehead remained as white as it had been before the march. But under the thick dust the faces of the Kazakh and the lad from Narofominsk were equally grey and only the eyes—Zheldu-

bayev's black and round and Lazarev's—a light blue—glistened brightly.

They never indulged in long conversations. They were too tired to talk in more than monosyllables. But as they trudged along side by side Lazarev would now and again enquire:

"Tired, brother?"

And Zheldubayev, pulling the damp newspaper cork out of his pot-bellied water flask, would offer the lukewarm, murky water to his comrade.

"You drink first," Lazarev would say.

"Never mind, go ahead," Zheldubayev would insist.

And in the evening if the supplies were late in coming they would share their rusks and roll one cigarette of home-grown tobacco for the two of them for the sake of economy. They took great care of each other. In general the spirit of comradeship was very strong in this company. That was perhaps because it was made up exclusively of young men. Drobot, the stalwart commander of the company, Berezyuk his second in command, a skinny, long-nosed chap, and Lieutenant Shchut, commander of the platoon, all the men in fact were approximately the same age, twenty or twenty-three. But some, like Drobot and Berezyuk, had been in the army for more than a year, while others, like Romanov and Zheldubayev were going into action for the first time.

They walked about with a slight swagger, stroking the automatic rifle slung across their chest. They looked down at the riflemen and were tremendously proud to be serving in a tommy-gun company. Their company always marched at the head of the regiment and passers-by would pause to look at them and say:

"See, there go the tommy-gunners."

Drobot was strict with them for the sake of discipline, insisted that they take proper care of their weapons, inspected their rifles, and kept the boys up to the mark, but they did not need much coaching for they realized the importance of their arms. Drobot and Berezyuk came from the Ukraine, their families had been left behind on occupied territory, Drobot's near Belgorod, Berezyuk's in the Vinnitsa Region. And both had an earnest concentrated air that communicated itself to the men. Berezyuk had been wounded in the autumn fighting and there was an ugly scar on his cheek. He was always nagging at the commanders of platoons and sections but it was obvious

that he did it not out of malice but because he was a good soldier and so no one took offence. Shchut, the platoon commander, was a great favourite with the men. Back in training camp he had earned the reputation of a good and loyal comrade and when he was made commander he had said to the men:

"The main thing, boys, is comradeship. That's something we ought to remember."

He himself was careful not to mar the comradeship that existed among his men.

Dark-eyed Romanov had worked in the famous Pavlov Handicraft Workshops on the Oka where they make the best pocketknives in the Soviet Union. When he was called up he had taken along a few of these wonderful knives with their innumerable gadgets, some were made in the form of an aeroplane, others were shaped like tanks. Romanov had thought that the knives would come in handy in the army; you could always exchange a knife like that for tobacco, matches and other necessities. But the comradeship in the company had been so strong and Romanov had taken such a fancy to his buddies that instead of exchanging his knives he had presented them to his comrades.

"As for me, boys," Lazarev had said with a sad smile, "I used to make chessmen out of birchwood. Darn nice chessmen I made, but I don't know how to play chess myself. Just imagine, worked from morning till night making those pieces and never learned to play chess. Didn't have the time."

While their footrags were drying the gunners sniffed the savoury smells emanating from the direction of the field kitchen and yawned. They were very hungry but they wanted to sleep even more after their 50 km. march.

But they did not get a chance to rest properly that time. German tanks and motorized infantry had broken through at one point near Stalingrad. The Germans were in a great haste to get to the Volga, they felt the moist breath of the great river in their nostrils, they felt the approach of winter and they were straining every effort to reach the big city before the cold set in. Savinov, commander of the regiment, received orders to go into action that night.

He walked past the battalions resting in the gully, scanning the worn faces of the men and listening to snatches of conversation. As he passed the tommy-gunners he searched their haggard young faces

which looked so boyish now. Many of them had never been in battle before.

How would they behave under fire, these youngsters in their sun-bleached tunics?

A few hours later the regiment went into battle. It lasted for more than ten days....

The regiment was again having a brief rest in a gully in the steppes. The warm evening air was filled with the droning of aircraft engines, high up in the blue heavens machine-gun bursts and cannon fire mingled with the whine of the engines.

A battle was being fought on land too at the moment. White and black clouds from the explosions spread over the flat plains, the staccato of semi-automatic guns mingled with the dull thud of heavy German shells. Now and again came the prolonged whine of the Katyushas and the din of battles that were being fought on land and in the air was drowned out by the thunder of explosions. Sometimes the noise would subside and it would suddenly grow so quiet that you could hear the rustling of the dry steppe grasses and the chirping of grasshoppers.

Down in the deep gully the men felt as calm and peaceful as though they were at home instead of only a few kilometres from the enemy. They lay on the ground stroking their rifles and stretching their aching limbs with grunts of satisfaction. Some of them took off their boots, others removed their tunics and again damp footrags and army shirts washed in cold water flapped lazily on the branches of wild pear and cherry trees. I looked at the young haggard faces of the tommy-gunners who had seen so many days and nights of fighting. For many this had been their first action. And on their faces was a queer mixture of boyish excitement and the maturity of men who had stared death in the face.

Drobot spoke calmly and thoughtfully. It is good when a young commander finds fault with himself after a battle and when he can speak calmly and objectively about mistakes that prevented the men from doing their best, when he earnestly tries to probe the causes of these mistakes. It is good when a young commander says nothing of himself, of his personal sensations and courageous exploits; it is good when he speaks with pride and admiration of the actions of his men. The company had stood the test.

Here is what Lazarev had to say about his first battle:

"They sent us ahead of the riflemen. After all, that's what tommy-gunners are for, isn't it? Orders were to get close to the forts. There were five of us: Romanov, the chap who gave the boys those pocket-knives, Petrenko, Belchenko, my pal Zheldubayev and me. It was getting on toward evening and the sun was setting. The firing was something fierce, the mines were coming over as thick as soup, you could hardly see a foot ahead of you for the smoke and dust, and the ground all round us was ploughed up by the mines. Those mines don't go down very deep, they sort of scratch up the ground the way a hen does. They come whining over and you drop down, and wait for the explosion and then you get up and move on. Several times the Jerries tried to get our number and believe me when these blasted things began exploding right next to me I was sure it was all up with me. I'm sure an older man would have given up the ghost long ago but we've got strong nerves and nimble feet. We kept darting this way and that so the Jerries lost their aim and we kept shoving forward. We were good and sore by now. We weren't going to let the bastards stop us. We were only about 200 metres away from the forts when suddenly five tanks came out from behind a hill and made a bee-line for us. Romanov was beside me at the time. He looked at them—it was the first time he'd seen a German tank. 'Well, this is the end, I guess,' he said. We lay flat on our bellies and watched them coming. I don't believe the thought of turning back occurred to any of us even then. The tanks halted and began firing over our heads. They kept it up for a bit and then went back behind the hill. We looked at each other. Time to get going again. Can't be helped, it's all in the day's work. So we crawled on. To tell you the truth we weren't feeling so good now. It was those tanks that did it. We were sure we would never come out alive. By now we were so close to the Germans we could see them distinctly. We counted about twenty-five tommy-gunners. There was an officer with them. He had his overcoat open and we could see his despatch case slung over his shoulder. He was walking back and forth looking over toward us all the time. Twenty-five of them and five of us. They all had tommy guns too. We lay still for a bit thinking our own thoughts. Then we opened fire. And as soon as we fired the first round Zheldubayev nudged me and said: 'I got the bastard.' I was sort of surprised. 'Go on,' I said. He looked at me grinning. 'It's a fact,' he said. And there was something about the way he said it that bucked us up tremendously and we

felt so good that we actually began to laugh. It couldn't have been more than a minute later when one of the German snipers hit Zheldubayev right in the forehead. He dropped down beside me without a word and the next moment he was gone. He lay there dead, his blood staining my coat. We four carried on. I don't remember what happened after that, I don't know how many of them we laid out or how many of them ran away. I don't remember. It was dark anyway. I only know it was they and not we that retired. I was left there with Zheldubayev in the steppes. I dug him a grave and lowered him into it. I said goodbye to him and filled in his grave."

The lads listened to Lazarev's story, gravely interjecting a remark now and again.

"That was a queer thing happened to Bugrov, remember? Too bad he was killed."

"It's true when the tanks came at us we all thought that was the end."

When Lazarev had finished his story dark-eyed Romanov said:

"I used to wonder what was the most terrible thing about war. Now I know: the most terrible thing is to lose a buddy in battle. When Lieutenant Shchut was dying he said to us: 'I only want you to remember one thing, boys, keep together, always keep together, there's nothing like comradeship in war.' And when he said that we all wept. I realized then that a comrade in battle is better than a father or a mother. I would never have believed that a whole company of tommy-gunners could weep."

The steppe was bathed in the rosy glow of the setting sun and dusk spread over the gully. Men with mess tins came from the direction of the field kitchen and the footrags and shirts gleamed white on the dark branches. I reflected how terribly wrong Junior Sergeant Roganov had been, how much better it was to lose one's life in battle than the respect and love of men like these young tommy-gunners.

September 17, 1942
Don Front
Northwest of Stalingrad

THE SOUL OF A RED ARMY MAN

THE ANTI-TANK rifle always reminds me of the old-fashioned arquebus. It is as big and unwieldy and is manned by two soldiers. Number one carries the gun when the unit is on the march; number two hauls the bulky armour-piercing shells that resemble the shells of a small-calibre gun, thirty of them in all, a rifle with a hundred bullets, two anti-tank grenades, in addition, of course, to his coat and kit-bag. All this together weighs about as much as the rifle. Carrying the rifle on the march gives number one an aching shoulder and makes his arm swell. It hampers his movements, makes it awkward for him to jump or walk on slippery ground and he has a hard time keeping his balance. The anti-tank rifleman walks with a slow shuffle, leaning slightly on the leg that supports the weight of the rifle. His walk is easily distinguishable from the light walk of the commander, from the measured tramp of the rifleman, from the swagger of the tommy-gunners and from the brisk step of the runner who is always on the go.

In appearance too it is easy to spot an anti-tank gunner by his broad shoulders and tough physique. These men belong to the hardy breed of Russian hunters who used to track down bears with spears in the dense forest. And it must be said that the ugliest grizzly is harmless compared to a heavy German panzer armed with rapid-fire cannon and machine guns.

Anyone with any experience in the iron and steel industry or mining will nearly always be able to tell by just looking at a worker whether he mans an open hearth or a blast furnace, whether he is a timberman or a miner. There is something about the gait, about the clothing, the way he talks and swings his arms when he walks that betrays a man's profession. Everyone seeks the occupation best suited to his nature and an arduous and noble profession complements the character of the worker, shapes him in its own image. In the army too the men tend to gravitate together according to age, physical strength, intellect, character and temperament. And it is the duty of every good commander, every efficient commissar to aid this natural selection, to help men to find their profession in the grim and arduous job of war.

For me Private Gromov was the typical anti-tank gunner, although there were other men in the company broader in the shoulder and

more resolute of movement; men like sallow-faced Yevtikhov, for instance, who had given the Germans plenty of headaches, or Senior Sergeant Ignatiev, a man with huge hands, a heavy chin and a habit of jerking his thick sunburned neck this way and that.

Gromov was a man of about thirty-seven. Before the war he had tilled the soil on a collective farm in the Narofominsk District of Moscow Region. Little did he suspect on that June morning a year ago when he went to the collective-farm stables to harness the horse to the clumsy farm cart that a year later he would be fighting heavy German tanks.

Looking at his greyish face free of sun tan, lined by long years of hard work, you could not help wondering whether it was really mere chance that had made this man an anti-tank gunner, No. 1 of an anti-tank rifle crew; might he not by the same token have found himself in the supply train, or despatch rider at Headquarters or as sentry for the quartermaster service?

No, not him. His curt irritated manner of speaking, his light, hard, brownish-green eyes, his movements and gestures, his hesitant speech, and his condescending attitude to the world, all gave a key to his character and made it obvious that it was no mere chance that had brought him to the anti-tank company. The frank challenge in his eyes, his hard, unforgiving attitude to human frailties, his bitterness about life's imperfections betrayed a strong uncompromising and obstinate nature.

When the company was on the march Gromov had suffered from some stomach ailment, but he had stubbornly refused to go to hospital. He walked along slowly under the pitiless steppe sun, with the gun over his shoulder. Chigarev, the section commander, had urged him to go to the medical unit.

"You'd better go and see a doctor," he said, "you're looking pale about the gills."

"What do I want doctors for?" Gromov retorted angrily. "Just let me keep going and I'll be all right."

"You'd better give me that gun to carry," said Valkin, No. 2 of the gun crew. "Your shoulder must be pretty sore by now."

"Don't you worry about my shoulder," growled Gromov. "You just mind your own business."

And he trudged on through the scorching white dust, now and again licking his parched lips and sighing heavily, his breath coming

in sobbing gasps. He was having a hard time. At night, exhausted though he was, he slept badly. He was restless and feverish. "A helluva war," he thought. "In the daytime you're tortured with the heat and at night you shiver with cold."

He had never been to the Volga Region before. With his keen glance that took in everything he studied the rolling steppeland, looked at the large fluffy kites clinging with their strong talons to the white slippery insulators on the telegraph poles. He gazed through narrowed eyelids at the river covered with little white flecks of foam raised by the strong wind from the lowlands. When they came to villages he chatted with the tall old Volga women and the greybearded fishermen, and sighed as he listened to the tales of the wealth of this vast river and the rich harvests of wheat, melons and grapes that had grown on its banks.

"So they've come all the way to Mother Volga, the skunks!" he reflected bitterly as he listened at night to the thunder of the guns that reverberated loudly over the plains. Sombre, anguished thoughts tormented him day and night, they gave him no peace, they filled him with a dull bitter resentment and hardened his heart against all who committed blunders and evinced signs of weakness.

He was possessed by the burning anger of a man uprooted by the war from his home, his fields, the wife that had borne his children, his was the bitterness of one who had seen with his own eyes the terrible disasters caused by the German incursion. He had seen the razed villages, the cartloads of refugees trailing along the dusty roads, he had seen old men and women, peasant women with infants in their arms sleeping under the open sky in gullies, he had seen innocent blood spilt, had heard terrible stories told with the unemotional simplicity that left no doubt as to their veracity.

And so neither illness nor the misery of marching along the hot dusty roads could break his will, could swerve him from his resolve to destroy German tanks.... That resolve grew and matured in Gromov's heart, the heart of a man who never forgave a wrong. The anger smouldered in his heavy heart, like a red-hot coal in the bowels of a blast furnace. Nothing could extinguish that fire now. He looked with contempt at the riflemen, at the crews of light machine guns. He believed implicitly in the power of his huge antitank rifle, he forgave it its weight and when, after the day's march was over, he removed it from his aching shoulder he never treated it

with irritation or disgust. With painstaking care he wiped the dust off the barrel with a rag, slowly and lovingly oiled the lock, tested the powerful spring of the trigger mechanism, examined the dark-grey steel gleaming through the grease. Before lying down to rest he would make sure that his gun was protected from dampness and dust, that no earth could get into the muzzle and that no one would step on it by mistake in the dark. He respected that big rifle of his, he believed in it as in peacetime he had believed in the stout steel of his ploughshares. He had been a skilled hand at ploughing in peacetime, and now in war Gromov had taken a firm grasp on the rifle that pierced the armour of German tanks. This rifle suited his nature, his turbulent soul, his lowering green eyes, the whole spirit of a man who never forgave a wrong and who remembered the good and the evil done unto him and his to his last breath.

Life had not been a bed of roses for him before the war. He had known the hardship of unremitting labour, he had known want. But nothing could compare with the wrong the enemy had done to his country. And so he marched against the enemy leaning heavily on the side weighted down by the burden of the rifle, licking his dry lips, breathing the hot, dusty air, a gloomy, taciturn fellow whose comrades gave him a wide berth. Thus in ancient times did warriors march with their cumbersome muskets, and everyone must have gazed at them with respect and hope not unmixed with fear. And his manner, his air of proud and faintly sardonic independence betrayed the soul of a man who had thrown himself body and soul into the grim business of war. He could, with a wry smile, give away his last cigarette, carelessly throw his only box of matches to a soldier in need of a light, he did not spare his anguished body, paid no heed to the suffocating throbs of his overburdened heart, never thought of death although he was advancing towards it with his slow, heavy tread.

"Say, Gromov," Senior Sergeant Ignatiev urged him, "you really ought to go to the medical unit."

"No," Gromov replied curtly.

It was hard for him. The whole weight of this cruel war seemed to be bearing down on his shoulders, he shivered at night and sometimes as he marched over the plains during the day a white mist obscured his vision and he did not know whether it was the dust or weakness that dimmed his eyes.

And he marched on and on, a sick soldier, stubborn and wrathful, expecting no praise for his great exploit—patience.

They took up positions during the night. They had to crawl forward on their bellies, pausing now and again to hug the earth as the fascist planes came roaring over the forward positions dropping flares to pick targets for their small-calibre bombs. These planes did not cause much damage but they made a lot of noise and disturbed the men's rest.

Gromov could not fall asleep. He lay at the bottom of a trench shaped so that the crew and the gun could be concealed if the German tankists succeeded in reaching our forward positions. Valkin dozed, leaning against the wall of the trench. He was cold and now and again he would tuck his coat around his thighs. Gromov sat next to him, his teeth chattering. The German plane dropped a flare directly over their heads and the unpleasant glare that lit up the trench woke Valkin. He looked at Gromov, yawned and said softly:

"See here, take my coat, I don't need it any more, honest to God. I can sit up for a bit. Had a bit of sleep already."

"Go ahead and sleep," Gromov replied.

He was always brusque with his buddy but in his heart he remembered these little tokens of comradeship. As for Valkin he often thought as he looked at the gloomy Gromov: "That guy will never let me down, he'll never let the Germans get me even if he has to drag me away with his teeth."

"Where's the Volga?" Gromov asked.

"Over to the left, I guess," said Valkin.

"And on those hills over there on the right are the Germans, I suppose," observed Gromov. "Got the shells where you can lay your hands on them in a hurry?" he asked.

"I've got the whole shooting match laid out," replied No. 2. "shells, grenades, bread and herring, anything you want."

He laughed but Gromov did not even smile.

As soon as the sun rose the fighting began. It was set off by our artillery and the German trench mortars. They drowned out all the other sounds of battle—the rattle of machine guns, the crackle of the automatic rifles and the brief howl of the hand grenades. The anti-tank riflemen were stationed ahead of our infantry on no man's land: Soviet shells whined over their heads, German mines

rending the air with a snake-like hiss exploded behind them sending a hail of splinters and chunks of earth beating a tattoo against the dry earth. Walls of white and black smoke and greyish-yellow dust rose in front of the anti-tank riflemen and behind them. All this is what is generally known as "hell." In the midst of this hell Gromov lay stretched out at the bottom of his trench, dozing. A strange feeling of calm filled his being. He had made it, he had not given up. He had got there with his rifle, he had gone on urged forward by the same frenzy of impatience with which the sick traveller hurries home fearing all delays, obsessed by the sole desire to see his near ones. So many times en route he had been afraid that his strength would fail him. But he had got there. He lay at the bottom of the trench and hell howled and raged in a thousand voices, while Gromov dozed, his aching limbs stretched out in the brief austere repose of the fighting man.

Valkin sat on his haunches beside him and, cursing under his breath, watched the battle rage. Sometimes mines hissed so close by that Valkin drew in his head glancing quickly at Gromov to see whether No. 1 had noticed his timidity. But Gromov was staring up at the sky with half-open eyes, and a calm, thoughtful expression on his face. Several times the Germans attacked and each time withdrew in the face of the Soviet infantry fire. Valkin grew increasingly nervous, he felt sure that in another few minutes the German tanks must appear. He glanced at Gromov and wondered anxiously whether his sick buddy would be able to hold out in an encounter with the German machines.

"Why don't you eat something?" he asked, then in the hope of getting a rise out of Gromov, he added: "I told the Sergeant-Major you ought to be getting vodka. Marvellous remedy for belly-aches, vodka is. But he wouldn't give any, the louse."

But even this interesting topic failed to rouse Gromov. He continued to lie on his back without speaking.

Suddenly Valkin gripped the edge of the trench in excitement. "They're coming!" he yelled at the top of his voice. "They're coming, Gromov! Get up!"

Gromov got up.

Through the smoke and dust raised by exploding shells moved the tanks, huge, swift and cautious, heavy and mobile, they came on. The Germans had resolved to break a path for their infantry.

Gromov breathed loudly and rapidly; he gazed eagerly at the tanks as they approached in deployed formation from behind the hillock.

I asked him afterwards what he felt at that first moment. Had he been afraid?

"Afraid? No, not afraid except that they might not come my way. Otherwise not.... Four tanks came in our direction. I let them come up close and took aim at one of them. He moved forward slowly like an animal sniffing the air. Never mind, I thought, sniff away. He was so close I could see him quite clearly. So I let him have it. Our rifle makes a helluva noise, even if you keep your mouth open it deafens you. But there's less recoil than with an ordinary rifle. It makes such a row though, that the earth trembles. Powerful thing!" And he paused to stroke the barrel of his rifle lovingly. "Well, of course, I missed that time. And the tanks moved forward. I took aim again. I felt happy and sore at the same time, and more excited than I had ever been in my life. No, says I, you can't let the damn Germans get the better of you. And some inner voice seemed to say: 'And what if you fail, eh?' Nothing doing, says I. And I let him have it a second time. This time I got him. I saw a blue flame leap out over the armour like a spark. And I knew that my little shell had gone home. The tank began smoking and I could hear the Germans inside shouting. Never heard such yelling in my life. Then there came a tearing sound from inside. That was their shells exploding. A huge tongue of flame leapt up skywards. That was one tank out of the running. I turned to the next one. I got that with the first shot. Again the blue flame licked the armour, then the smoke and the shouting and again the yellow flame and the smoke. I thought I would burst with joy, all my sickness vanished and I felt wonderful. I had never felt so proud and happy before. I felt I could look the whole world in the face now. I had shown that I was stronger than they. For weeks I'd been tortured day and night with the thought that I might not be able to do it...."

Our conversation took place in a gully. The sun had already set and twilight descended on the gully where we sat, blurring the contours of the anti-tank rifles.

His account of his first encounter with tanks had stirred Gromov. His eyes seemed to shine in the gloaming, they were large and bright, green and hard.

And I sat next to him and gazed in silence at this sick soldier who had overcome the Germans, this man for whom fighting came hard, this ploughman who had turned to fighting tanks not by mere chance, not by command of his superior officers, but of his own free will, with all his soul.

September 20, 1942

THE BATTLE OF STALINGRAD

ONE MONTH ago a Soviet Guards Division with its three infantry regiments and artillery, supply columns, ambulance unit and other auxiliary services arrived at a fishermen's settlement on the eastern bank of the Volga, opposite Stalingrad. The march was accomplished in unusually quick time—on trucks. Day and night trucks raised clouds of dust over the level steppeland beyond the Volga. The kites perched on the telegraph poles became grey with the dust raised by hundreds and thousands of wheels and caterpillar tracks. The camels looked round with alarm: it seemed to them that the steppe was on fire. The great open spaces were wreathed in smoke, alive with motion, roaring, while the air had become murky and heavy; the sky was enveloped in a rusty red shroud, and the sun was suspended like a dark sword of Damocles over a land plunged in gloom.

The Division made practically no halts on the way. The water boiled in the radiators, the engines became overheated. On their brief stops the men scarcely managed to swallow a mouthful of water and shake the soft, heavy layer of dust from their tunics when the command to return to the trucks was given and the mobile battalions and regiments were again roaring on their way south. The steel helmets, the faces of the men, their uniforms, the gun barrels, the covers on the machine guns, the powerful regimental mortars, the trucks, anti-tank guns, ammunition crates—everything was a greyish brown, everything covered with soft, warm dust. The roaring of motors, the honking of horns and the wailing of sirens were ever in the men's ears as the drivers were constantly signalling, afraid of collisions in the murky haze of dust that hung over the roads.

Everyone was caught up in the fever of the rapid movement—the men, the drivers, the gunners. Only to General Rodimtsev did it seem that his Division was moving too slowly. He knew that the Germans had breached the Stalingrad defences in the course of the

last few days and broken through to the Volga, occupying a hill overlooking the city and the river and advancing along the main streets of the city. And the General spurred on the Division, cutting still shorter their already brief halts. The intensity of his will was transmitted to thousands of men until all of them felt that their whole life consisted in this impetuous march that never stopped day or night.

The road made a turn to the southwest, and soon maples and willows with their smooth red twigs and narrow silvery-grey leaves made their appearance, while all around stretched vast orchards of low apple trees. And as they drew nearer the Volga, the men caught sight of a dark cloud high up in the sky. It was impossible to mistake this cloud for dust. It was evil looking, billowing and black as death; the smoke of the burning oil tanks rising over the northern part of the city. Large arrows nailed to the tree trunks pointed in the direction of the Volga, and on them was printed the word: "Ferry." That word made the soldiers uneasy; it seemed to them that the black border around it came from that deadly smoke that hovered over the burning city.

The Division reached the Volga at a time of dire peril for Stalingrad. They could not wait for nightfall to make the crossing. Hastily the men unloaded crates of arms and munitions. They were issued their rations of bread, sugar and sausage together with grenades and bottles of liquid fuel.

It is no easy task to get a full strength division over the Volga in the best of times. To get it across in broad daylight with Messerschmitts winging their way through the skies like yellow wasps, German dive bombers pounding the banks, and mortars and tommy-gunners firing from the hills on the broad unobstructed expanse of river before them is not only difficult, it is well-nigh impossible.

But the rapid pace of advance developed by the Division while on the march, coupled with the desire to come to grips with the enemy, helped them to cope with this task. The crossing was effected so quickly and so boldly that there were few casualties. The men embarked on barges, ferries and rowboats. "Ready?" asked the oarsmen. "Full steam ahead!" shouted the captains of the tugboats, and the greyish, mobile strip of rippling water between the vessels and the bank suddenly began to grow, to spread. The waves lapped the prows of the vessels, while hundreds of eyes gazed tensely, now

at the water, now at the low bank overgrown with leaves already beginning to turn yellow, now over to where the fire-ravaged city that had been overtaken by a cruel and heroic fate loomed in a whitish haze of smoke.

The barges rocked on the waves, and the men, landlubbers that they were, shrank from the prospect of having to meet the enemy on the water instead of *terra firma*. The air was intolerably clear and pure, intolerably cloudless the blue sky, mercilessly bright the sun, treacherously unreliable the flowing, turbid waters. But no one took pleasure in the fact that the air was pure, that the cool river freshness cleared the lungs, that eyes inflamed with dust were soothed by the tender humidity of the Volga. There was silence on the barges, ferries, tugs and rowboats. Oh, for the stifling, heavy dust of the ground over the river now! Why was the bluish smoke screen so transparent and so thin! Heads constantly turned in alarm, while everyone stared at the sky.

"There comes a dive bomber!" shouted someone.

About fifty yards from the barges a tall, slender, bluish-white column with a crumbling top suddenly rose from the water. The column crashed onto the deck, drenching the men with its spray. And immediately, still closer, another column rose and crashed, followed by a third. Just then the German mortars opened rapid fire on the crossing Division. The shells burst on the surface of the water and the Volga was covered with gaping, foamy wounds; fragments rapped against the decks of the barges; the wounded cried out softly, softly, as if they were trying to conceal their wounds from friends, enemies, and even themselves. And now the rifle bullets spattered over the water.

There was one horrible moment when a heavy shell hit a small ferry. A sheet of flame darted up and a pall of black smoke enveloped the ferry. There came the sound of the explosion and a long-drawn-out human shriek that seemed to have been born of this thunder. And at once the thousands of men saw among the fragments of wreckage floating on the water the green gleam of the heavy steel helmets of swimming men. Twenty of the forty Guardsmen on the ferry had perished.

That was indeed a terrible moment, when the Guards Division, strong as the fabular knight Ilya Muromets, was unable to help the twenty wounded men who slowly drowned before its very eyes.

The crossing continued at night, and perhaps never before since the existence of light and darkness had people been so glad of the gloom of a September night.

General Rodimtsev spent this night in intense activity. Since the outbreak of the war Rodimtsev had experienced many trials. His Division fought at Kiev, routed the SS regiments that had broken through to Stalinka, had time and again broken through enemy encirclement, passing from defence to furious attack. A fiery temperament, a strong will, calm assurance, quickness to react, and the ability to attack at times when to any other it would appear impossible even to dream of attack, military experience and caution combined with personal bravery are characteristic features of this young General. And the nature of this General has become the second nature of his Division.

I have often had occasion to encounter in the army men who were staunch partisans of their particular regiment, battery or tank brigade. But perhaps never before have I seen such devotion to their unit, such loyalty, as exists in this Division. This devotion is deeply moving and at the same time it is often the least bit comical. The men of the Division take pride primarily, of course, in their military exploits, pride themselves on their General, on their materiel. But if one were to listen to the commanders, it would appear that nowhere else are there such cooks, who bake such wonderful pies, or such barbers, like Rubinchik, who is not only a masterhand at shaving but a gifted performer on the violin. If ever the men want to put someone to shame, they say: "Good God, how can you do that, and you in our Division...." In the same way one often hears: "I'll tell the General.... The General will be pleased.... The General will be disappointed...." Whenever the veterans talk about great military feats, they are always sure to introduce into the conversation: "That's how it is, our Division always fights on the most important sectors."

In the hospitals the wounded men of this Division are always worried lest they be transferred to another unit. They bombard their comrades with letters and when discharged from hospital they often undertake long and arduous journeys in search of the Division.

It may be that on this night, when the last units made the crossing to Stalingrad, the General thought that the friendship binding

his men would help him to win through in this unique and difficult situation.

And indeed it would be difficult to imagine a more complicated and unfavourable set up for the beginning of a battle. Upon arriving at Stalingrad the Division was split up into three sections: first, its reserves and heavy artillery remained on the eastern bank, separated from the regiments by the waters of the Volga; second, the regiments which had crossed into the city were also unable to maintain a solid front since the Germans were already wedged in between two of the regiments—the regiment that had made its way into the factory district and that which had crossed further downstream to the centre of the city.

I am convinced that it was this feeling of "Divisional" patriotism, love, habit, which cemented the commanders, a certain singleness of style in fighting, a unity of character in the Division and its commanders that to a great extent helped the individual units to operate as an integral whole rather than singly, that helped them to establish communication, to act in concert, and, in the final analysis, that brilliantly solved the general task by creating an unbroken front of all three regiments and establishing an uninterrupted supply of munitions and food. It was this spirit of unity that underlay the military skill, courage and persistence of the Division's commanders and men.

In the city itself the situation was serious. The Germans considered that their occupation of Stalingrad was a matter of a day, possibly hours. The backbone of our defence was, as is frequently the case in critical situations, the artillery. But the Germans were putting up an energetic and fairly successful fight against the latter through their tommy-gunners—the conditions of street fighting made it possible for them to creep up to the gun emplacements undetected and to put the crews out of commission with sudden volleys of fire. The Germans were sure that at any moment they would break through to the bank and force us back into the Volga. But it was not for nothing that columns of trucks had been moving up amid clouds of dust, day and night, not for nothing that the regiments had moved forward.

In the morning General Rodimtsev crossed to Stalingrad on a motorboat. The Division was assembled and ready for action. What should be the move of this Division that was joining the ranks of

the troops defending Stalingrad? The Division whose reserves were on the other side of the Volga, whose Headquarters were fifteen feet from the river's edge, and one of whose regiments was "wedged out" from the others by the Germans. Should they take up the defensive, immediately set about digging themselves in, entrench themselves in the buildings? No, that would not do. The situation was so serious that Rodimtsev decided to resort to another method, one he had already put to the test at Kiev. He launched an attack! He threw all his regiments, all his tremendous fire power, all his skill, and his ardour into the attack. He attacked with all the fury, pent-up bitterness and wrath that seized his men at the sight of the city with its white houses, its splendid factories, broad streets and squares lying there so grievously ravaged in the red glow of the rising sun. Like a great eye bloodshot with wrath and grief, the rising sun stared at the bronze figure of Kholzunov; at the eagle with the single wing outspread over the ruined building of the children's hospital; at the white figures of the young nudes that stood out against the velvety black background of the Palace of Physical Culture, now covered with the soot of a conflagration; at the hundreds of mute, blinded houses. And the thousands of men who had made their way across the Volga looked at the city that had been mutilated by the Germans with eyes just as bloodshot with wrath and sorrow.

The Germans did not expect an attack. They were so confident that by steadily pressing our forces back towards the bank they would succeed in throwing them into the Volga that they had not built any major fortifications in the areas they had occupied. The Guards regiment under the command of Yelin, together with two other regiments, stormed the streets of districts that had been occupied by the Germans. Their primary aim was not to link up with the other regiments but to thrash the enemy, to wrest from the Germans their advantageous positions which allowed them to dominate the bank, the river and the main crossing. Yelin's regiment went forward without seeing its two fellow regiments. But the regiment was confident that it was not alone in undertaking this bold thrust. It knew that the other two Guards regiments were near at hand. It felt their presence, heard their heavy tread; the thunder of their artillery sounded like the voice of brothers; the smoke and flame of the encounter rising high into the air told them that the Guards were moving forward, while dive bombers hovered over the fighting

battalions of the Guardsmen from morning till night like alarmed seagulls.

Yelin's regiment took big buildings—strongholds of the Germans—by storm.

Never before had they had to wage such battles. Here all generally accepted conceptions were turned on their head; it was as if the forest, the steppes, the mountain slopes, the chasms and undulating plains had moved up into the city on the Volga. It seemed that all the salient features of every theatre of war—from the White Sea to the mountains of the Caucasus were concentrated here. In the course of a single day a unit would pass through shrubs and trees reminiscent of the Byelorussian groves into a mountain gorge, where in the shadow of the walls rising on either side of narrow pathways it would have to make its way over the debris of fallen walls, only to emerge an hour later onto a great asphalted square, a hundred times flatter than the Don steppeland; and in the evening it had to crawl over vegetable patches amidst heaps of earth and half-charred ramshackle fences, exactly like those in some distant Kursk village. And this abrupt shifting of scene demanded constant tension, quick thinking and rapid manœuvring on the part of the commanders. Sometimes a stubborn attack on some house would last for hours, battles being fought under the walls of the buildings, in the brick-strewn, half-demolished rooms and corridors, where the men would trip over torn-up wires, stumble over wrecked remains of metal bedsteads, kitchen and household utensils. And these battles in no way resembled any that were being fought in any other theatre of war from the White Sea to the Caucasus.

In one building the Germans had entrenched themselves so firmly that it became necessary to blow them sky-high together with the heavy walls. Under the withering fire of the doomed Germans six sappers carried 3 cwts. of explosives to the building and set them off. Just picture the scene to yourself for a moment: a group of sappers, Lieutenant Chermakov, Sergeants Dubovoy and Bugayev, Privates Klimenko, Shukhov and Messerashvili, crawling under fire along the ruined walls, each of them carrying half a hundredweight of death in their hands, their faces sweat-stained and grimy, their tunics tattered. Sergeant Dubovoy calls out:

"Don't funk it, you sappers!" And Shukhov, twisting his mouth and spitting out the dust, replies:

"Bit too late to funk now. Should've thought o' that before!"

And while Yelin was triumphantly taking building after building, the other two regiments were attacking the Mamayev Hill—a spot with which much of Stalingrad's history is connected, ever since the days of the Civil War. Here the children used to play, lovers used to stroll, sleds and skis flashed down in the winter time. This spot was heavily ringed on both the Russian and German army maps. When the Germans captured it, General Todt, doubtless, wirelessed the fact gleefully to German Headquarters. There it was designated as a "height, commanding both banks of the Volga and the whole city." Commanding height! Frightful words those. The Guards regiments took it by storm.

Many splendid men perished in those battles. Many of them will never return to their mothers and fathers, sweethearts and wives. Many of them will live on only in the memories of their comrades and their families. Many bitter tears will be shed throughout Russia for those who fell in the battles for that hill. This engagement cost the Guardsmen dear. Red Hill they will call it. Iron Mound, they will call it—covered as it is with jagged bomb and shell splinters, with the stabilizers of German air bombs, with powder-stained cartridge cases, with fluted fragments of grenades, with heavy steel carcasses of overturned German tanks. But there came that glorious moment when Private Kentia tore down the German flag, threw it to the ground and trampled on it.

The regiments of the Division met. An attack of unprecedented difficulty, started practically from the river's edge, was crowned with success. This ended the initial stage of the Division's operations in Stalingrad. The front held by its regiments extended in a solid line over favourable and advantageous terrain. In these battles the men had acquired tremendous and priceless experience such as could not have been acquired in a single military academy anywhere in the world, for never before as long as the world has been in existence have there been such battles as these: soldiers fought in the streets and squares of a big city against tanks, artillery and mortar regiments, supported by powerful air armadas. In these battles hundreds and thousands of men and commanders learned what it meant to fight for many-storeyed buildings; signal corps men learned to lay wire not by the reel but in separate lines along the house walls; in these battles the importance of radio communi-

cation was thoroughly appreciated; sappers learned how to mine and clear streets and lanes. Private Khacheturov, who removed a hundred and forty-two German mines under enemy fire, could no doubt lecture on this question. Men and commanders both learned the full value of mortars, anti-tank guns, hand grenades and anti-tank rifles in street fighting. They learned how to camouflage the powerful Divisional materiel in houses and cellars. And as Major Dolgov, Regimental Commander, put it, "The Guardsmen acquired a positive affection for the bottle of inflammable liquid."

The second period of bitter fighting began—a period of defensive warfare, with scores of sudden, powerful thrusts by German tanks, fierce raids by dive bombers, counter-attacks by our units, sniper warfare in which all fire weapons, from rifles to heavy guns and dive bombers, took part; a new period of amazing, strange and wholly unprecedented battles. Not only hours, but whole days and weeks of life were spent in this smoky inferno where guns and mortars did not cease fire for a single moment, where the roar of tanks and aeroplane motors, coloured flares and exploding mines became as habitual to the city as were at one time the clanging of streetcars, the hooting of automobile horns, the lights of street lamps, the many-voiced hum of the Tractor Plant, the business-like voices of the Volga steamers. And here the men who were fighting lived their life—here they drank tea, prepared their dinners in huge cauldrons, played on guitars, joked, chatted, and followed the progress of neighbouring units. Here lived people whose nature, habits, souls and way of thinking were absolutely at one with the nation that had sent its sons to accomplish these arduous feats.

At nine in the evening we visited Divisional Headquarters. The dark waters of the Volga were lit up by multi-coloured flares that drooped on invisible stems over the shattered embankment, and all the while the waters kept changing from silky green to violet blue, or suddenly turned rosy, as if all the blood of this great war were draining into the Volga. I could hear the tapping of tommy guns from the direction of the factories and volleys of gunfire kept lighting up the dark chimneys. For a moment it seemed as if the factories were working as usual, that the tapping was made by the night shift of riveters and that the factory buildings and chimneys were being lit up by the flares of acetylene torches. The night air alive with bullets whistled penetratingly and shrilly; German mortars

hissed viciously as they rent the stillness of the Volga with the crash of explosions. The light of flares disclosed the wrecked buildings, the trench-scarred ground, the dugouts plastered along the cliff and in the gullies, the deep pits roofed over with pieces of metal and boards against bad weather.

"Do you know whether they've brought up dinner?" asked a Red Army man sitting at the entrance to a dugout. From the darkness a voice replied:

"They went a long time ago, but they haven't come back yet. They're either lying low somewhere or they won't get there at all. The firing is something awful around the kitchen."

"Damn it, I'm hungry!" grumbled the Red Army man and yawned.

Divisional Headquarters was located deep underground, in quarters resembling a horizontal drift in a coal mine. The drift was lined with stone, reinforced with beams, and, as in a real mine, had water gurgling in its depth. Here, where all conceptions were changed, where an advance of yards was equal to a gain of many miles in field conditions, where in some cases the distance to the enemy besieged in an adjoining house was a matter of a few dozen paces, it was only natural that the dispositions of the Divisional command posts were also changed. Divisional Staff Headquarters were some two hundred and fifty yards from the enemy, and regimental and battalion Headquarters were correspondingly located. "Communication with the regiments in the event of a breakthrough," jokingly remarked a member of the Staff, "can easily be maintained by word of mouth; just shout and they'll hear you. And a voice carries just as easily from them to the battalions." But nevertheless the routine of Headquarters was the same as usual—this was something that never changed, wherever Headquarters might be: in the forest, in palace or in hut. And here, underground, where everything trembled and shook with the reverberations of bursting bombs, the Staff commanders sat poring over a map, and here the telephonist was shouting words that have become traditional in all sketches from the front: "Moon, moon!" and in a corner, smoking cigarettes rolled from home-grown tobacco and trying not to blow the smoke in the direction of their chiefs, sat the despatch riders.

Here, in the drift lit up by oil lamps, one felt that all the threads leading from the wrecked houses, factories and mills occupied by

the Guards Division were held by one man, that the questions of the commanders were directed to one man, that one man with a slightly ironical, measured and deliberate way of speaking determined the way the Guardsmen lived. The men's voices were calm, often drawling, and their movements were leisurely. Smiling faces were common and laughter was frequently heard. These men whose wills had been trained in fighting behaved as if they were doing the hardest job in the world easily, without effort, as if it were a joke. Yet it was stuffy here. When someone came in from the outside big round beads of sweat immediately stood out on his forehead and temples, and his breathing became rapid and uneven.

The floor of the drift, the walls, the ceiling, everything trembled with the force of the bomb explosions and the blows of the shells as if it were the foundation of a dam holding back the terrible pressure of the enemy forces pushing towards the Volga. The telephones jingled, the flames danced in the lamps, and huge indistinct shadows moved shudderingly over the wet stone walls. But the people were calm—they were here, in the thick of it today, they had been here a month ago, they would be here tomorrow. A few nights previously the Germans had broken through and had flung hand grenades down the incline. Dust, smoke and fragments had flown into the drift and from the darkness had come the shouts of commanders in a language that sounded strange and savage here, on the bank of the Volga. And in that hour of peril, Divisional Commander Rodimtsev had remained the same as ever: calm, with a slightly ironical turn of speech, every measured word of his throwing a weighty rock into the dam that the enemy force had breached. And the enemy had reeled back.

The Division had entered into the swing of the fighting. The men's breathing, the beating of their hearts, their briefly snatched moments of sleep, the orders of the commanders, the firing of the guns, machine guns and anti-tank rifles—everything had entered into the swing of the fighting. It seemed to me that it was perhaps the hardest thing of all to acquire this feeling of rhythm to get into the swing of sudden raids by dive bombers, attacks of fascist infantry by day and by night, sudden onslaughts of dozens of tanks which would suddenly appear now at dawn, now at three in the afternoon, now in the falsely reassuring calm of the evening twilight. The rhythm of the storm! The rhythm of the Battle of Stalingrad!

Rodimtsev told me about a recent night skirmish in which German sappers took part.

He spoke in a low thoughtful voice although the teaspoon on the roughly-made table jumped about madly, as if it wanted to get out of this reverberating drift with the dim shadows flickering on the walls. The rat-tat-tat of an automatic rifle was heard here distinctly.

"That's a German," said Rodimtsev.

He spoke to me in detail, taking his time.

"The fighting here is mobile, flexible," he said. "There are battles at night, battles in the daytime, or else tanks attack, and sometimes we get a combination of tanks, aircraft, artillery and mortars all concentrating on one point. The Germans deliberately change their tactics. But in the course of this month we've learned to fight under these conditions. We operate mainly in small groups. Buildings are tackled by two groups: one for the assault, the other to dig in. The men attack with grenades, bottles of liquid fuel and light machine guns. While the attack group is still finishing off the enemy, the other group brings up ammunition, food and supplies for at least six days, because as often as not they're surrounded. Only today two men came in, they'd been fighting for fourteen days in a house surrounded by 'German' buildings. Calmly they asked for rusks, ammunition, sugar and tobacco, loaded up and went off, saying that two others were still in the house, taking care of it and that they were dying for a smoke. In general this fighting in houses is a peculiar business. What is characteristic of the fighting in Stalingrad is its flexibility, the abrupt and almost instantaneous changes in tactics and, in fact, in the whole nature of the fighting. Either there's fighting for a single house, or you get what happened just a little while ago, when two German infantry regiments and seventy tanks suddenly swooped down on Panikhin's regiment, attacking ten and even twelve times a day."

I asked him whether he wasn't worn out with the incessant strain of fighting, with this incessant roar and boom, with these hundreds of German attacks—day and night.

"I don't mind," he said. "That's war after all. I believe I've seen everything there is to see already. Once my dugout was flattened out by German tanks and after that a tommy-gunner threw a grenade, just to make sure. I chucked that grenade out, and here I am, you

see, still fighting, and I intend to continue fighting to the very last minute of the war."

He said this calmly and quietly. Then he began to ask me about Moscow. Naturally we got onto the subject of theatres.

"We had two concerts here too—Rubinchik, our barber, played the fiddle."

And all the men around us grinned, remembering the concerts.

During the course of our conversation the telephone rang a dozen times, and the General, barely turning his head, said two or three words to the officer on duty. And these brief words, so easily and matter-of-factly pronouncing military orders, revealed the triumphant force of the man who had mastered the swing of the fighting, the man who dictated this terrible, precise rhythm of battle, which has become the rhythm, the style of the Guards Division, the style of all our Stalingrad divisions, of all our Soviet people fighting in Stalingrad.

Colonel Borisov, the General's second in command, had issued the final orders before the attack on one of the buildings occupied by the Germans. This five-storey house was strategically important, for its windows gave the Germans a view of the Volga and part of the bank.

The plan of attack amazed me by reason of the great detail and finesse with which it was elaborated. The house and all the neighbouring structures had been accurately drawn on a map. Symbols indicated that there was a machine gun in the third window on the second floor, snipers at two windows on the third floor, and a heavy machine gun at another window—in a word, the whole house had been reconnoitred by storeys, windows, back and front entrances. Mortar-gunners, hand-grenade throwers, snipers and tommy-gunners took part in the storming of this house. The regimental artillery and powerful guns stationed on the opposite bank of the Volga also took part in the attack. Every branch of arms had its task, strictly co-ordinated with the general aim, and all were in communication with one another; operations were directed by a system of light signals, by radio and by telephone. The guiding thought of this offensive was simple and at the same time involved: the goal would have been clear to a child, but the road to this goal seemed so involved that only a person highly versed in military matters could have travelled it.

And in this too you felt the peculiar features of the Battle of

Stalingrad. Here was a tremendous elemental clash of two states, of two worlds battling in a life and death struggle, combined with a mathematically and pedantically precise battle for a single storey of a house, or for a street crossing; here the characters of two nations and military skill, thought and will power were pitted one against the other; here a battle was going on that would decide the fate of the world, a battle in which all the strength and all the weaknesses of the two nations became evident: one of these nations having risen in battle for the sake of world dominion, the other for world liberty, against slavery, falsehood and oppression.

Late at night we slipped down the broad-bosomed Volga along the Stalingrad waterfront on a motorboat for a distance of six kilometres.

The Volga was seething. The blue flame of exploding German mortar shells hissed on the waters. Death-bearing splinters were whining. Our heavy bombers droned angrily in the dark skies. Hundreds of screaming blue, red and white tracer bullets sent by the German AA batteries sped after them. The bombers spewed forth the white trajectories of machine-gun bursts on the German searchlights. On the other side of the Volga it seemed as if the whole universe shook with the mighty roar of the heavy guns and the deafening blast of our powerful artillery. On the right bank the ground trembled with the explosions. Vast conflagrations caused by bombs flared up over the factories, and the earth, the sky, the Volga—everything was enveloped in flames. And one felt that the fate of the world was being decided here in the titanic struggle in which calmly, solemnly, amidst the smoke and flame, our people were battling.

October 20, 1942
Stalingrad

TSARITSYN—STALINGRAD

"WORKERS AND PEASANTS, honest toiling citizens of the whole of Russia! Days of the greatest hardships have arrived. There is not enough bread in the towns and in many of the gubernias of our exhausted country. The toiling population is worried over its fate. The enemies of the people are taking advantage of the difficult straits to which they have driven the country in pursuance of their own treacherous ends: they are sowing discord, forging chains and are trying to wrest the

power out of the hands of the workers and peasants. Former generals, landowners and bankers are lifting their heads. They are hoping that the people, driven to despair, will let them seize the power in the country. . . ." Thus begins one of the most vivid and forceful documents of the revolution, signed by Lenin and Stalin, and published on May 31, 1918, in the *Pravda*.

A quarter of a century separates us from the time when the young republic, born in the fire and smoke of World War I, fought for its life. The German army began its offensive on February 18, 1918. At the beginning of May the Germans occupied all of the Ukraine, the Crimea and Byelorussia. Field Marshal Eichhorn set up his residence in Lipki, one of the loveliest districts in one of the loveliest cities of Europe—Kiev. General Krasnov held sway around the Don. Denikin at the head of the "Volunteer Army" was marching on the Kuban with Yekaterinodar as his objective. In Georgia the Mensheviks were in control, while the Germans, whom they had invited, ruled in Tiflis and were nearing Baku.

In the summer of 1918 the towns of Novo-Nikolaevsk, Chelyabinsk, Omsk, Ufa, Penza, Samara, Simbirsk and Yekaterinburg were in the hands of the insurgent Czechoslovak corps. In Siberia a Whiteguard government was being set up. A counter-revolutionary uprising took place in Yaroslavl. There was unrest in the countryside. Famine and disease joined forces with the counter-revolutionary forces against the central regions of the Soviet country.

The very ground seemed to be rocking and crumbling underfoot. The people exhausted by three years of war, bled white, tortured by hunger and devastation, took up arms once again to fight for their honour, for liberty, for land.

The huge pincers of the counter-revolution were closing in on Moscow and Petrograd. The enemy was advancing from north and south, from east and west. If these pincers had closed, the Soviet land, deprived of its food resources, would have been obliged to defend itself on all fronts against the combined forces hostile to the revolution. The last stronghold of Soviet power on the road of the German invaders and of General Krasnov armed by them was a city on the Volga known as Tsaritsyn.

The heavy ring of the enemy encirclement was about to close at Tsaritsyn. The great strategists of the great Revolution were fully aware of this. In addition to everything else, Tsaritsyn blocked the

path of German imperialism to the Caspian Sea, to Baku, to Messopotamia, Arabia and Iran.

It was in the sultry month of August. The thunder of the guns grew louder every night. Krasnov's forces were driving toward Tsaritsyn. Toward the middle of the month the situation became critical. Krasnov's forces reached the Volga north and south of Tsaritsyn, surrounding the city. Fighting raged in the suburbs of Gumrak, Voroponov, Sadovaya. At night the streets were lit up by searchlight beams. Factory whistles sounded the alarm and workers from the Dummeau munitions plant, from the huge Maximov Bros. Sawmills and the Nobel oil refineries came by the thousand to defend their city. The workers became the iron core of the Tsaritsyn defences. Here, side by side with the Tsaritsyn proletarians, fought the men of the Communist Division, consisting mainly of miners and iron and steel workers from the Donetz Basin. They had fought their way to Tsaritsyn repulsing the Whiteguard forces that harassed them day and night, rebuilding literally with their life's blood the shattered bridge across the Don under artillery fire and joining the Tsaritsyn workers in order to share with them the titanic job of defending the city. Subsequently the Rogozhsko-Simonovsky workers' regiment formed in the Moscow Guzhon and Dynamo plants came here too. Stalin and Voroshilov were here.

August 15, 1918, was a critical day in the defence of the city. To many the situation seemed hopeless. At 7 p.m. on August 15 the Military Council wrote over the signatures of Stalin and Voroshilov:

"The Council of People's Commissars and all revolutionary neighbours are following with tense interest and all possible support the heroic struggle of Red Tsaritsyn for the most vital interests of the whole of Soviet Russia and for its liberation from the incursions of the Krasnov bands.

"The salvation of the Red city depends on the continued staunchness, discipline, conscientiousness, endurance and active initiative of Soviet circles.

"The city is still in a state of siege."

The help expected from Astrakhan did not arrive. A counter-revolutionary uprising had flared up in that city. A similar action had been scheduled for 2 a.m. on August 18 in Tsaritsyn itself, but the plot was discovered by the Cheka. *The Soldier of the Revolution*, the Red Army newspaper, informed its readers in a special issue on

August 21: "A big Whiteguard plot has been brought to light in Tsaritsyn. The most prominent of the conspirators have been arrested and shot. Nine million rubles were found in their possession. The plot has been nipped in the bud due to measures taken by the Soviet authorities. Take care, traitors! Merciless retribution awaits each and all who harbour evil designs against the Soviet workers' and peasants' government."

Krasnov's forces did all in their power to capture Tsaritsyn and to disrupt Soviet rule from within. But the city held out. At the cost of great sacrifice, bloodshed and nervous tension, by the almost superhuman effort of the workers and by the iron will of Stalin, the first onslaught of the enemy forces was repulsed, the ring of encirclement was breached and communication lines restored. The Lugansk and Siversk workers' regiments fought valiantly. Alyabyev's armoured train sped back and forth, appearing now on the northern and now on the southern sector of the front. The Tsaritsyn workers, the members of the Young Communist League and of the Communist Party suffered heavy casualties. The Red artillery pounded the enemy day and night.

On August 22 our forces occupied the villages of Pichuga and Yerzovka. On the night of the 26th our units captured the Kotluban railway station, seizing trophies and smashing Mamontov's headquarters. On that day Stalin wired to Parkhomenko in Moscow: "The situation at the front has improved. Bring all you have received immediately. Stalin." It is, of course, impossible to give a consecutive account here of all the events of the first and second encirclement of Tsaritsyn in 1918 and of the Denikin-Wrangel campaign against Tsaritsyn in 1919.

When one thinks of the life of this city, of its grim lot and the noble part it played in the difficult early days of the Soviet state, one gets a clear picture of the main features of Tsaritsyn's character and destiny. There are men whose lofty destiny is the heavy burden of war. Even if you chance to meet one of these men somewhere in the theatre, at an art exhibition, or at home in shirt sleeves and house slippers, you somehow divine from his swift, abrupt movements, from the expression of gravity that suddenly comes over his face, from some calm authoritative word he lets drop, that sooner or later this man is destined to endure great privations, to live on soldiers' hardtack and suffer the trials and tribulations of frontline life.

Cities, like human beings, have their own destinies. It fell to the proud lot of Tsaritsyn-Stalingrad, the city which stands on the great Volga divide between the north and the south, the city behind whose back stretch the sands and steppes of Kazakhstan, and whose broad bosom is turned to the west, towards the rich granaries of the Don and Kuban, to be the stronghold of the revolution in the fateful hour of the nation's history.

Twenty-four years have passed since Tsaritsyn, standing firm against the onslaught of the enemy, prevented the dark forces of reaction, advancing from the north and from the south, from joining up and, dropped like a mighty axe upon the Germans sending them reeling back in the midst of their headlong drive.

Two decades of peaceful development have passed. The trenches around Gumrak, Voroponov and Beketovka are grass-grown. Trees spread their branches where baggage carts once lumbered. Many of the veterans who took part in the defence of Tsaritsyn have passed away. The once black hair of the worker-volunteers has become hoary with age; and the barefooted youngsters who ran around among the smoking field kitchens of the Red Army men, who gathered spent cartridge cases and played at war where war raged, are grown men, fathers of families, and noted citizens of the Soviet state.

The people of Stalingrad developed rapidly and so, too, did the city itself during the years of peaceful Soviet life. The huge Dzerzhinsky Tractor Plant, the Red October Works and the Barricades Plant employed tens of thousands. A shipbuilding yard and a power station were built. Old factories and works were reconstructed and scores of new plants sprang up. In two decades of Soviet government, the city which at the turn of the century could boast of only two high schools, one library, one orphanage and four hundred taverns, acquired some splendid institutions of higher education (engineering, medical and pedagogical) with noted professors and a student body of fifteen thousand, scores of training schools and hundreds of other schools, libraries and museums.

The streets where sandstorms and dust had roamed at will were paved with asphalt. A green belt, twenty kilometres wide, with hundreds of hectares of orchards, lanes of maple and chestnut trees grew up around the city. Squat one or two-storey houses and crooked streets were replaced by tall, white buildings, modern thoroughfares

and spacious squares with beautiful monuments, trees and bright flower beds. Hundreds of solicitous hands swept, cleaned and watered the streets of Stalingrad, and from a city of sandstorms, Stalingrad became a city of pure Volga air, a city of sunshine and health.

Seen from the Volga at night Stalingrad looked like a gigantic, sixty-kilometre garland of dazzling electric lights from the illuminated signs over stores and theatres, cinemas, circuses and restaurants. Music, amplified by loudspeakers, wafted over the Volga. The people took pride in their city, loved it, and rightly so, for Stalingrad had become one of the most beautiful cities in the Soviet Union, a city of industry and learning, of bright sunlight and vast spaces, the city on the Volga.

The people of Stalingrad were particularly fond of their city because of the hard work, the sacrifices and privations its construction had cost them. Those were memorable decades. Now in wartime some of the people who went through this period of peacetime construction look back on it as a calm and cloudless idyll. That, of course, is not the case. Conditions were not easy in those years of intense labour; our country weathered no few storms, and the great plans of collectivization and industrialization were not carried through lightly.

The people of Stalingrad remember the grim period when the Tractor Plant, the first giant of the First Five-Year Plan, was born. Abroad this construction undertaking was watched with cold hostile eyes. How many difficulties and failures were experienced, what superhuman efforts of will, what mental strain went into it!

The whole country followed the construction job in Stalingrad with unabated interest, rejoicing in its successes and sorrowing at its failures. On June 17, 1930, the plant was opened. Now began the period when the intricate technique of conveyor production, utterly new to Russia, had to be mastered. This involved further difficulties, a new and tense struggle. The foreign press prophesied the collapse of the young plant. They wrote: "In view of the failure of the Stalingrad Tractor Plant the Soviet Union will again be obliged to buy tractors abroad." The big and small conveyors were constantly stopping and holding up production. During the first year the plant put out 1,002 tractors in all; in 1931 production had leapt to 18,410 tractors, the following year to 28,772, and soon 50,000

tractors were rolling off the conveyors annually. The difficulties had been left behind. The favourite of the Soviet people, the first giant of the First Five-Year Plan, was working at full capacity.

When excursion steamers approached the lovely white city on the Volga the passengers beheld thousands of windows glittering in the sun, emerald green parks and gardens, heard the hum and lively bustle of traffic. They saw besides the black smoke of industry curling skywards above the three gigantic factories: the Tractor Plant, the Red October Works and the Barricades Plant, and through the smoky windows of workshops they caught glimpses of sparks as molten steel poured from the ladles. They heard the heavy rumbling of machinery, like the thunder of waves on the seashore. This was Red Tsaritsyn, Stalingrad, impressing on people's minds that it was aware of its destiny as the Russian fortress on the Volga, that it had not forgotten the grass-grown trenches at Gumrak, at Voroponov, at Sadovaya and Beketovka, and that it was ready again, if need be, to play the part it had played in its glorious past in a fateful hour of the nation's destiny.

...In the afternoon of August 23, 1918, the workers of the Miners' Regiments of the Communist and Morozovo-Donetz Divisions, acting on orders of Voroshilov, launched an offensive on the central sector of the front in the vicinity of Voroponov and hurled back the enemy that had been besieging the city.

Exactly twenty-four years later, at 5 p.m., on August 23, 1942, eighty heavy German tanks and columns of mobile infantry broke through to Stalingrad's first-born—the Tractor Plant. Simultaneously, hundreds of enemy bombers released their loads on the residential districts of Stalingrad. This was the first onslaught of the fascist hordes in their frantic drive eastwards to the Volga.

The city was ablaze, shrouded in smoke from which huge tongues of flame shot skywards. It seemed as though the two decades of peaceful labour between the first German occupation of the Ukraine and the Don and this second German invasion had never been. Once again, in the smoke and din of battle, Red Tsaritsyn-Stalingrad, the city of grim and illustrious destiny, rose to make a stand.

There can be no comparison between the force of the German onslaught in August 1942 and the force of the attack launched by

Krasnov's troops in 1918. The powerful impact of the tank divisions, the terrific fire of thousands of guns and mortars, the vicious air raids cannot be compared even with the most devastating blows struck in the first World War. The art of warfare has changed completely since that time. The battlefield did not look like this then, the battles were not directed thus, there were no barrages of fire like this. Now tank-borne and mobile troops manœuvred swiftly. Battles raged in the air such as no one could have imagined in 1918. The sky and the ground co-operated, and huge masses of men and materiel were transferred swiftly by air from one sector of the front to another. Today things are done on a bigger scale with more punch, faster.

Only one thing has remained unchanged—the people. One would not think that it was the men of another generation who now went out to defend Stalingrad; the stout hearts of a great people, the hearts of Yakov Yerman, Nikolai Rudnev and Alyabyev did not stop beating twenty-four years ago. When those eighty German tanks suddenly appeared near the grounds of the Tractor Plant and hundreds of aeroplanes strafed the residential quarters of the city, the workers of the Tractor Plant and the Barricades Plant went right on working. The plant produced 150 guns in a single night while 80 tanks were repaired between August 23 and August 26.

That first night, hundreds of workers armed with tommy guns and heavy and light machine guns, took up positions on the northern fringe of the factory grounds. There they fought shoulder to shoulder with the gun crews of the heavy mortar batteries commanded by Lieutenant Sarkisyan, which had been the first to hold up the German tank column. They fought side by side with the crews of anti-aircraft guns commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Herman, half of whose guns tackled the German dive bombers while the other half opened point-blank fire at the German tanks. There were moments when the blast of bursting bombs drowned out all other sound and it seemed to Lieutenant-Colonel Herman that Lieutenant Svistun's battery, which occupied a forward position, had been silenced by the co-ordinated action of the German planes and tanks; but soon he again heard the measured firing of the anti-aircraft guns. The battery held its ground for a whole day, although all communication with the regimental command post was cut.

In the evening of August 24, four men managed to carry their wounded commander, Lieutenant Svistun, to safety. They were the

sole survivors. All the other members of the gun crews had been killed. The first onslaught of the enemy, however, had been repulsed. The Germans did not succeed in taking the city in their stride. Fighting began at the approaches to the city, in the very streets and squares of the city itself, in the workers' suburbs and the sites of Stalingrad's giant plants.

Fighting has been raging in Stalingrad itself for seventy days—one hundred days if one includes the battles at the distant approaches to the city. The immortal names of scores and hundreds of commanders and men should be engraved for all time in the history of the Land of the Soviets—the names of sharpshooters Chekhov and Zaitsev; the names of the thirty-three heroes who repulsed the attack of a column of heavy tanks; the names of the worker-volunteers Tokarev and Polyakov; of Krylov, Commissar of a tank-buster unit; of flyers, tankmen, mortar-gunners and infantrymen; of the woman steel-smelter—Olga Kovaleva; of Sergeant Pavlov, who, together with his platoon, has been holding a house on one of the main squares of Stalingrad for fifty days. This house is called "Pavlov's House" in official orders and despatches. It is thanks to the blood which these men are shedding, to their iron will and valour, that Stalingrad is holding out.

The losses sustained by the German army are enormous, the number of killed and wounded approximating 200,000. Thousands of tanks, over a thousand guns and aircraft have been converted into heaps of metal scrap. The losses in materiel can be made up; new herds of German soldiers can be driven to the slaughter, but there is no power on earth that can return to the Germans the three months they lost, no way at all of re-establishing the original tempo of the summer offensive. The tactical success of the German summer offensive has not been crowned by a major strategical result. The advance east and south has been stopped. The Volga stronghold has held out. The city that has chosen as its proud and difficult lot that of being the stronghold of the Russian revolution, the city that succeeded in stemming the onslaught of the enemy in the first year of the existence of the Soviet Republic, has now, on the occasion of its twenty-fifth anniversary, once again played a decisive part in the course of the Great Patriotic War.

And now this city lies before us in ruins, some of which are still smoking and warm, like corpses not yet grown cold; others are frigid

and gruesome. At night the moon lights up the gutted buildings and the stumps of trees mown down by shells. In the cold greenish moonlight the desolate asphalted squares glisten like ice-bound lakes, and the huge dark patches of the craters made by high-explosive bombs look like holes in the ice. The shell-battered factories stand silent; no smoke curls from the chimney-stacks, and the flower beds which once ornamented the factory grounds look like burial mounds.

A dead city? No, Stalingrad lives! Even during the short lulls in the fighting, life is astir in every wrecked house, in every factory. Keen-eyed snipers are ever on the lookout for the enemy; shells, bombs and cases of cartridges travel along the communication trenches in the ruins; observers ensconced in the upper storeys watch every movement of the enemy. In the basements commanders are poring over their maps, orderlies are typing despatches, members of the Political Staff deliver talks to the men, newspapers rustle, sappers are hard at work on some dangerous assignment.

The ruins only seem to be deserted, empty, dead. But suddenly a German tank moves cautiously around the corner of a house. Almost instantaneously a tank-buster who has been keeping vigil day and night opens fire on the fascist machine. From the window of one of the houses a German machine-gunner, who is covering the tank opens fire at the brick wall which protects the tank-buster. One of our snipers, covering his friend, the tank-buster, opens fire on the German machine-gun nest from the second floor of a neighbouring house. Evidently the German is wounded, or possibly killed—at any rate the machine gun is silenced. In a flash German mortars begin to explode and red brick chips fly from the wall of the house in which our sniper is concealed. The Germans were avenging their machine-gunner. Our observer reports the location of the German battery, and the Soviet guns, which up till now have maintained silence in their emplacements behind the windows and the front doors of houses, open fire. In the meantime, the German tank has beaten a hurried retreat and has vanished around the corner. The sniper, the tank-buster and the light artillery quickly change their positions. This is what happens in the rare minutes of a lull in the fighting.

But most often the houses, the squares and the factories are an inferno of roaring guns and bursting shells and bombs. Life is not easy in Stalingrad just now.

I have in front of me a leaf torn from a notebook. It is a pencilled report only recently received at Battalion Headquarters from one of the company commanders. Here is the text:

"Time: 11.30 hours.

"First Lieutenant Fedoseyev of the Guards.

"The situation is as follows: The enemy is trying to surround my company, sending tommy-gunners to my rear, but so far all his attempts have failed. The Guardsmen are holding their ground. Men and commanders are fighting like heroes. Although our ranks are thinning, the enemy will never penetrate our lines. The country will ring with the fame of the 3rd Rifle Company; as long as the commander is alive the fascist swine will not pass. The commander of the 3rd Company is in difficulties. He is disabled, deafened and weak, feels dizzy, and can hardly stand on his feet; his nose is bleeding badly. But in spite of all difficulties the Guardsmen of the 3rd Company will not yield an inch. We'll fight to the last for the City of Stalin. Our Soviet soil will be a graveyard for the enemy. I have faith in my men and subordinates. Kalaganov."

No, the great city has not died! Heaven and earth tremble at the thunder of our big guns; the fighting is just as hard as it was two months ago. Tens of thousands of living hearts beat evenly and strongly in the houses of Stalingrad. They are the hearts of Stalingrad workers, of Donetz miners, of workers and peasants from the Gorky, Urals, Moscow, Ivanovo, Vyatka and Perm Regions. Against these brave hearts the German attacks have been shattered, for these hearts are the most loyal in the world.

Never was Stalingrad so grand and beautiful as it is now. Reduced to ruins, it stands acclaimed by the freedom-loving peoples of the whole world. Stalingrad lives. Stalingrad fights on. Long live Stalingrad!

November 5, 1942
Stalingrad Front

AS CHEKHOV SAW IT

FOR MANY DAYS and many nights these all-seeing eyes kept watch over the city from the fifth floor of the ruined building. They saw the street, the square, the rows of buildings with shattered floors and ceilings, the empty lifeless skeletons of buildings filled with a

deceptive stillness. Those round hazel eyes, neither light nor dark, saw the distant hills pitted with German dugouts; they counted the smoke of bonfires and field kitchens, the cars and horse carts that drove up to the city from the west.

Sometimes it was so quiet that chunks of plaster could be heard falling in the house across the street occupied by the Germans, and sometimes snatches of German conversation and the creaking of German boots. But at other times the bombing and firing was so loud that you had to shout into your buddy's ear and though you shouted at the top of your voice your buddy would shake his head to indicate that he did not hear.

Anatoly Chekhov was going on for twenty. His life had not been a happy one. The son of a chemical plant worker, a bright, intelligent lad with a warm heart and unusual ability, a passion for books and a flair for geography, this boy who dreamed of ocean voyages, who was a favourite among his comrades and neighbours and who won the hearts of veteran workers by his readiness to help a friend in need, this lad had known the shady sides of life since he was ten. His father drank and in his cups he treated his wife, his son and his daughters brutally. About two years before the war Anatoly Chekhov had left school where he was a star pupil and had gone to work at a factory in Kazan. He quickly picked up several trades, became an electrician, a welder, and finally a foreman respected by all his workmates.

When on March 29, 1942 he was called up he asked to be sent to a snipers' school.

"I never even had a sling-shot when I was a kid," he told us. "I didn't like hurting living creatures. At the snipers' school I got along pretty well in all other subjects except target shooting. At the first lesson I disgraced myself by scoring nine out of fifty. 'You're good at everything but shooting,' said the Lieutenant. I'm afraid you won't make a go of it, my boy!'"

But Chekhov was not discouraged. Instead he studied at night as well as by day. For hours on end he read books on theory for he had a healthy respect for theory and believed firmly in the power of books. He learned to perfection the many principles of optics until he could talk about the laws of the refraction of light, of true and illusory vision like an expert; he could trace the complex path of a ray of light through the nine lenses of the optical sights and he

understood the theoretical principle of all the optical equipment. He saw the image presented in his optical sights not only as a marksman but as a physicist as well.

The Lieutenant was mistaken for at the moving target test Chekhov hit the small jerky figure "in the head" with all three bullets. He finished the snipers' school with honours and at once asked to be sent to the front although it had been suggested that he stay on as an instructor to teach students to handle not only a sniper's rifle but an ordinary rifle, a tommy gun and various types of hand grenades. His natural ability enabled him to pick up the art of warfare as easily as he had mastered the different trades at the plant back home.

This young man whom everyone liked for his kindness and his devotion to his mother, his sisters and his friends was sent to the advance positions. He was content.

"I wanted to be one of those who are destroying the enemy with their own hands," he said to me once.

While on the march he had trained himself to measure distances without the aid of optical sights. He would try to guess the distance to a certain tree and then would measure it by steps. At first, of course, he went wide of the mark, but gradually he learned to measure considerable distances with the naked eye with a margin of error not exceeding two or three metres. This helped him in the job of fighting no less than his knowledge of optics and the laws governing the movement of a ray of light through nine concave and convex lenses. He became engrossed in the subject to the exclusion of everything else. The most idyllic landscape became for him nothing but the combination of landmarks: birches, briar bushes, windmills were merely places behind which the enemy could hide.

During his first days on the Stalingrad front Chekhov commanded an infantry section, and subsequently a mortar platoon. Chekhov set himself problems and solved them cleverly and subtly, and in solving them he not only had to strain his strong young limbs and his clear perfect vision: he had to think, and think harder and faster than he had ever done before in solving the complex problems in physics and algebra his mathematics teacher had been fond of frightening the students with.

From the very first he did not see the battle as a chaos of fire and noise, but learned to guess what exactly the enemy was driving at.

"Was I scared at first? I don't think so. I felt as if I was back in school teaching the men to camouflage themselves, to shoot and to advance."

Men at the front often talk about bravery. As often as not the talk turns into a heated debate. Some say that bravery is a sort of oblivion that comes to a man in battle. Others frankly admit that when accomplishing acts of bravery they are conscious of fear and are obliged to force themselves by an effort of will to advance in the face of death. Others claim that they are brave simply because they have convinced themselves that they will never be killed.

Captain Kozlov, a very brave man who had led his motorized rifle battalion many times into heavy attacks told me that he, on the contrary, was brave because he was convinced that he would be killed and hence it did not matter whether death came today or tomorrow. Many believe that men grow accustomed to danger, that after a time under constant fire they become indifferent to the thought of death. At the root of most men's courage and contempt for death is a sense of duty, a hatred for the enemy, a desire to avenge the fearful disasters the incursion has brought the country. The young soldiers say that they accomplish exploits out of desire for glory; some feel responsible for their behaviour in battle to their friends, their relatives, their sweethearts. One elderly Divisional Commander, a man of great courage, when asked by his adjutant to take cover, laughed and said:

"I love my two children so much that nothing can ever kill me."

I do not think the fighting man has any need to argue about this courage business. Every man is brave in his own way. The tree of courage is mighty, its thousand intertwining branches raise aloft the glory of our army, of our great nation.

But if every brave man is brave in his own way, there is only one kind of cowardice: blind obedience to the instinct of self-preservation. The man who will flee from the battlefield today, will tomorrow run out of a flaming house leaving his old mother, his wife and children to be roasted to death.

Chekhov possessed another variety of courage, the simplest, perhaps, the most reliable. He was by nature a complete stranger to the fear of death, he feared death no more than the eagle fears the altitudes.

When he got his first assignment it took him a long time to decide

what position to take up, whether in the cellar, or on the first floor, or else among a heap of bricks torn out of the wall of a tall building by a high-explosive bomb. He examined carefully and painstakingly the buildings in the advance positions of our defence, the windows with the scorched strips of curtains, the twisted and matted coils of torn electric wiring, the bent girders, the shattered mirrors, the charred remains of nickel double beds. His keen vision took in every detail. He saw the bicycles hanging from the walls over a chasm of five wrecked storeys, he saw the gleaming fragments of green crystal wine glasses, chips of mirrors, the scared ends of potted palms on the windowsills, warped pieces of tin that had been blown by the hot breath of fire like leaves of paper, the black tarred cables stripped of their covering of earth, thick water mains, the muscles and sinews of the city.

Chekhov made his choice. He entered a tall building and ascended the almost undamaged staircase to the fifth floor. Here and there the steps had been smashed and on the landings through the burned-out doors he could see the empty shell of the interior. The different floors could be distinguished only by the different colour of the walls; a flat on the second floor was painted pink, the third floor, dark blue, the fourth pale green with a brown border. Chekhov climbed up to the landing of the fifth floor. This was what he had sought. The front wall was gone leaving a gap that gave a good view of the whole locality: the houses across the street where the Germans were entrenched, the broad straight street running to the left and beyond, about 700 metres away, the square. All this was in German hands, Chekhov took up a position on the landing behind a sharp projection in the wall, keeping well within its shadow. Thus he could see without being seen. He rested his rifle on the top of the iron railing and looked down. There were plenty of landmarks here.

Down the deserted street walked two German soldiers. They stopped within a hundred metres of where Chekhov sat. The lad looked at them for several minutes. He hesitated. That strange feeling of indecision familiar to nearly all snipers before firing their first shot took possession of him. Chekhov had heard about it from the famous Pchelintsev who had come to the snipers' school and had talked to the students about the first shot he had fired at a fascist soldier.

Soon night fell. The blue sky turned a dark indigo. The tall fire-gutted buildings stood like silent grey corpses. The moon rose. It

climbed to its zenith and looked down, round and clear. It was a ripe honey-coloured moon and like the white beeswax its light had neither warmth nor fragrance. This cold waxy light spread in a thin film over the dead city, over hundreds of eyeless buildings, making the asphalt of streets and squares gleam like ice. Chekhov remembered the books he had read about the ruins of ancient cities, and an awful, bitter pain wrung his young heart. It seemed to choke him, so great was the pain and the desire to see this city free again, alive and happy, to bring back the thousands of young girls on the chill plains waiting shivering for passing cars to give them a lift; he thought of the little boys and girls who with the gravity of old people had watched the troops marching toward Stalingrad; the old men muffled in shawls; the grandmothers who wore their sons' coats on top of their jackets.

A shadow flitted over the cornice. A large Persian cat with a fluffy tail passed by noiselessly. She looked at Chekhov with eyes that burned with a blue flame. Somewhere at the end of a street a dog began to bark, then another, and a third. He heard a German voice, lifted in anger, the crack of a pistol shot, the anguished howl of a dog and again that loud, angry, alarming barking of many dogs. These were the loyal watchdogs preventing the Germans from rummaging at night in the wrecked houses.

Chekhov rose to his feet and looked down. He saw dark figures moving swiftly through the shadows. The Germans were carrying sacks and pillows over to the building they occupied. He dare not shoot for fear of disclosing his hiding place. "What are our men thinking of," he said to himself in anger, and as if in answer to his thought, a Soviet machine gun began to pit angrily.

Chekhov rose, and picking his way carefully to avoid stepping on the fragments of glass that now glittered brilliantly in the moonlight, went downstairs. The infantry section had taken up its quarters in the cellar of the building. The Sergeant was asleep on an old-fashioned nickel-plated bed, the men lay on the charred strips of silken eiderdowns. Someone poured Chekhov a mug of tea. The kettle had just boiled and the edge of the tin mug burned his lips. He was not hungry and refused the offer of some millet mush. He sat on a pile of bricks and listened to a Red Army man from Stalingrad talk about life in his city before the war: the movies, the swimming club, the beach, the theatre, the elephant in the zoo who had

been killed in the bombing, the dance halls and the wonderful girls.

As he listened Chekhov still had before him the vision of the dead Stalingrad under the light of the full moon. He recalled his unhappy childhood. "Father often made rows. It was hard for me to study when he was about and I had no corner of my own," he had told me.

But that night he realized fully for the first time the terrible evil the Germans had brought to our country, he realized that the petty hardships and privations were nothing compared to the great national calamity. And his kind young heart burned with fury.

The Sergeant woke up. The springs on the nickel bed creaked as he moved.

"Well, Chekhov," he said, "how many Germans did you bag on your first night?"

Chekhov did not answer. He sat lost in thought. Suddenly he turned to the men who had recently returned from sentry duty and were about to play the gramophone.

"Please don't play the gramophone tonight," he said.

The next morning he rose before dawn. He did not eat or drink anything, he only poured some water into his flask and put a few bits of dry bread into his pocket. Climbing up to his post he lay down on the cold stones of the landing and began his vigil. The sun rose bathing everything in light and such was the vital force of the early morning sun that even the unhappy city seemed to smile a faint wan smile. Only under the protruding wall where Chekhov lay was there a cold grey shadow. From around a corner a German appeared carrying an enamel pail. Later Chekhov learned that the soldiers always came out with their pails at this time of the morning to fetch water for the officers to wash with. Chekhov turned the distance knob, the crossed hairlines in his sights rose, he shifted them four centimetres forward from the soldier's nose and fired. A black spot appeared beneath the soldier's cap, his head jerked backward, the pail fell with a clatter from his hand and he crashed down on his side. Chekhov was trembling with excitement. A minute later another German appeared around the corner with a pair of field glasses in his hands. Chekhov pressed the trigger. Then a third German wanted to go over to the dead soldier with the pail. But he never got there. "Three," said Chekhov and his trembling ceased.

Chekhov's eyes observed many things that day. He discovered which way the Germans went to their headquarters located behind the building diagonally across from where Chekhov had his post.

He knew it was the headquarters because soldiers were constantly running there with white report papers in their hands. He discovered by which route the Germans brought up ammunition to their tommy-gunners and machine-gunners in the house across the street. He discovered the road by which the Germans brought food and water for drinking and washing. The Germans dined on dry food. Chekhov knew their stable menu: bread and canned goods. Around dinnertime the Germans opened heavy mortar fire and kept it up for about forty minutes after which they yelled in chorus: "Russ, dinner!"

This mocking invitation made Chekhov see red. There was something repulsive to this lad in the attempt of the Germans to jest amid the tragic ruins of this tortured dead city. It infuriated him and steeled his heart against the enemy. He learned quickly to distinguish the men from the officers. The latter wore short jackets, peaked caps, and shoes but no belts. He could tell the soldier apart by his boots, his leather belt and his trench cap. He did not want the Germans to walk about the city upright, he did not want them to drink fresh water and eat breakfast and dinner. The young Chekhov who loved books and geography, who dreamed of long voyages, the loving son and brother, became a killer, a destroyer of the invaders.

By the end of the first day Chekhov spotted an officer. He tripped confidently along and tommy-gunners popped out of all the buildings and stood at attention as he passed. Once again Chekhov turned the distance knob, the hairlines crossed, the officer's head dropped back and he fell on his side, his shoes pointing toward Chekhov.

Chekhov noticed that it was easier for him to hit a running man than a motionless one. The hit came straight in the head. He made a discovery that helped him to become invisible to the enemy. In most cases it is the flash of the discharge that gives the sniper away. So Chekhov always fired against the background of the white wall, keeping the muzzle of his rifle about twelve or fourteen centimetres from the edge of the wall. Against the white background the flash was invisible.

He wanted only one thing now: to prevent the Germans from walking upright about Stalingrad, he wanted to press them to the ground, to drive them into the very earth. And he got what he wanted.

By the end of the first day the Germans no longer walked, they ran, and at the end of the second day they were crawling. No longer did the soldier venture out in the morning to fetch water for his officer. The path which led to the source of drinking water grew deserted, the Germans gave up drinking fresh water and confined themselves to the stale water from the tank. On the evening of the second day Chekhov pressed the trigger and said: "Seventeen." That evening the German tommy-gunners went without supper.

Chekhov went downstairs. The men were eating their supper to the strains of "The Blue Scarf" played by the gramophone. Then they all sang, "The Spreading Ocean Wave." The Germans opened a furious fire, with mortars, cannon and heavy machine guns. The hungry tommy-gunners were most ferocious of all. But they no longer cried: "Russ, supper!"

All night long the air was filled with the ringing clatter of spades and picks as the Germans dug communication trenches. On the third morning Chekhov saw many changes. The Germans had dug two trenches leading to the asphalt street. They had given up the idea of water but they intended to bring their ammunition up along these trenches.

"Aha, so I made you crawl after all," thought Chekhov. It was then that he noticed a small embrasure in the wall of the house opposite. It had not been there yesterday. He knew what that meant. A German sniper.

"Look," he whispered to the Sergeant who had come up to watch him work, and he pressed the trigger. There was a shout, and then the sound of running feet as the German tommy-gunners carried away their sniper before he had had a chance to fire a single shot at Chekhov.

Then Chekhov turned his attention to the trench. The Germans crawled along up to the asphalt road, spurted across and jumped into the second trench. Chekhov began to fire just as they emerged onto the asphalt. The first German he tried it on crawled back into the trench.

"And now I've driven you into the earth," said Chekhov with satisfaction.

On the eighth day Chekhov had all the roads leading to the German-held buildings under control. But it was time to change his position for the Germans had stopped moving about and firing. He

lay on his landing and stared with his youthful eyes at the city the Germans had lacerated, this young man who as a boy had "hated to hurt living things" and whom the stern and sacred logic of patriotic war had transformed into a merciless avenger.

November 16, 1942
Stalingrad Front

THE LINE OF THE MAIN DRIVE

THE SIBERIAN regiments of which Colonel Gurtiev was Divisional Commander moved into position at night. There had always been something grim and severe about the plant, but nowhere in the world could a grimmer sight have been seen than the sight that met the eyes of the men on that October morning of 1942. The dark towering bulk of the shops, glistening wet rails already touched with rust, a chaos of smashed freight cars, piles of steel girders scattered in confusion over a yard as big as a city square, heaps of coal and reddish slag, huge smokestacks riddled by German shells—such was the zone assigned to the Division. Dark bomb craters yawned in the asphalted square, and fragments of steel rent by the force of the explosions like so many strips of calico were strewn about everywhere.

The Division was ordered to stand fast in front of this plant. Behind it flowed the dark icy waters of the Volga. At night the sappers smashed the asphalt and dug into the stony soil with picks, building trenches. They bored loopholes in the thick walls of the shops, and fixed up shelters in the cellars under the ruined buildings. The regiments under Markelov and Mikhalev were assigned to defend the plant. One of the command posts was set up in the concrete conduit that passed under the structures of the main shops. Sergeyenko's regiment defended the area abutting on a deep ravine running through the workers' hamlets to the Volga. The "Gully of Death" the men and commanders of the regiment called it. Yes, behind them flowed the dark icy waters of the Volga, behind them was the fate of Russia. The Division would have to stand firm to the death.

The last World War had cost Russia great sacrifices and much blood, but at that time the dark force of the enemy had been divided between the Western and Eastern fronts. In this war Russia bore the whole brunt of the German offensive. In 1941 the German regiments

were moving from sea to sea. This year, in 1942, the Germans concentrated the entire force of their thrust in a southeasterly direction. The force that had been divided between two fronts of the big powers in World War I, that last year had pressed with all its weight solely on Russia along a front of 3,000 kilometres, this summer and this autumn was brought down like a sledge-hammer on Stalingrad and the Caucasus alone. Even more, here in Stalingrad the Germans intensified the smashing force of their offensive to the utmost. They stabilized their efforts in the southern and central sections of the city, directing the full fire power of innumerable mortar batteries, thousands of guns and aircraft against the northern section of the city and this very plant, the Barricades Plant, that stood in the heart of the industrial district. The Germans assumed that human nature could not stand such a strain, that there were no hearts or nerves but would give way in this frenzied inferno of fire and shrieking metal which shook the earth and rent the air. Here was concentrated the entire diabolical arsenal of German militarism—heavy tanks and flame-throwing tanks, six-barrelled mortars, armadas of dive bombers with screaming sirens, shrapnel bombs and high-explosive bombs. Here, tommy-gunners were supplied with explosive bullets, artillerymen and mortar-gunners with thermite shells. Here was concentrated German artillery from small-calibre anti-tank semi-automatics to heavy long-range guns. Here bombs resembling innocent red and green balls were thrown, and air torpedoes that blasted craters the size of a two-storey house were launched. Here, night was as light as day from the glare of fires and flares, and day as dark as night from the smoke of burning buildings and smoke screens. Here, the uproar was as dense as earth, and the brief intervals of silence seemed more terrifying and ominous than the din of battle. And while the world pays tribute to the heroism of the Russian armies, and the Russian armies speak with admiration of the defenders of Stalingrad, here—in Stalingrad itself—the men exclaim with awe and respect:

"What we've done is nothing much! Now what those fellows are doing who are holding the plant—that's something. It's hair-raising and flabbergasting to see the clouds of smoke and fire and German dive bombers hanging over them day and night. And yet there they stand pat."

"The line of the main drive"—no words are more sinister than these to the ear of a military man; in war there are no words more fraught with menace. Hence it was no matter of chance that it was Colonel Gurtiev's Siberian Division that came to hold the plant on that gloomy autumn morning. Siberians are a sturdy folk, stern, inured to cold, taciturn, sticklers for order and discipline, and blunt of speech. Siberians are a rugged folk, men who can be depended upon. In grim silence they hacked into the stony ground with their picks, cut loopholes in the walls of the shops, and built dugouts, bunkers and communication trenches, preparing to defend themselves to the death.

Colonel Gurtiev is a lean fifty-year-old man. He left the St. Petersburg Polytechnical Institute in his second year, in 1914, to enlist in the army, served in the artillery, and saw action against the Germans at Warsaw, Baranovichi and Chartoriisk. Twenty-eight years of his life has been devoted to military affairs—fighting and training officers. Two of his sons are fighting in this war as lieutenants. He left his wife and daughter behind him in distant Omsk.

And on that solemn and awful day the Colonel thought of his sons, now lieutenants, his student daughter, his wife, the scores of young commanders he had trained, and the whole of his long, industrious, modest, spartan life. Yes, the hour had come when all the principles of military science, the morale and sense of duty which he had instilled with stern consistency into his sons, his students and his colleagues were to be put to the test. Anxiously the Colonel peered into the faces of the Siberians—at these men from Omsk, Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk, Barnaul—with whom fate had linked him in the task of repulsing the enemy's blows.

These Siberians who had moved into the great defence line were well prepared. The Division had been thoroughly schooled before it came to the front. Colonel Gurtiev had trained his men assidiously, intelligently, exactingly. He knew that no matter how gruelling military training was with its drills in night attacks, tanks driving over men cowering in tiny pits, and long route marches, actual warfare was a hundred times worse. He had confidence in the staunchness and strength of his Siberian regiments. He had tested them en route to the front, and throughout the long journey there had been only one untoward incident, when a man had dropped his rifle from the train. The soldier had jumped out of the car, snatched up the rifle and

had run three kilometres to the next station to overtake the front-bound train. Colonel Gurtiev had tested the staunchness of his regiments in the Stalingrad steppe when these men of his, who had not yet been under fire, coolly repulsed a surprise attack of thirty German tanks. He had tested the endurance of his Siberians during their last spurt to Stalingrad, when in two days they had covered two hundred kilometres. Nevertheless, the Colonel peered anxiously into the faces of his men as they took up their position in the main defence zone—in the line of the main drive.

Colonel Gurtiev had confidence in the officers under his command. Colonel Tarassov, his young Chief of Staff, a man who never tired, could sit day and night over his maps in a dugout which shook with the blasts of explosions, oblivious to everything but his work of planning an intricate battle. His frankness and ruthless judgment, his habit of looking facts in the face and seeking military truth, however bitter it might be, was based on iron faith. This short wiry young man with the face, speech and hands of a peasant possessed indomitable strength of mind and spirit. Svirin—the Divisional Commander's second in command and Political Officer—was a man of strong will, keen intelligence and ascetic modesty. He had the faculty of remaining cool, cheerful and smiling when the calmest and most cheerful man on earth would forget what smiling meant. Regimental Commanders Markelov, Mikhalev and Chamov were men in whom the Colonel took special pride, and he trusted them as he trusted himself. Everybody in the Division spoke with esteem and admiration of Chamov's cool bravery, of Markelov's inflexible will, and of the fine spiritual traits of Mikhalev—the most popular man in his regiment—who showed such fatherly concern for his subordinates, mild, likable yet unaware of the meaning of fear. And yet Colonel Gurtiev peered anxiously into the faces of the officers under his command, for he knew what the line of the main drive and what holding the great Stalingrad defence line meant. "Will they stand it? Will they hold firm?" was what he asked himself.

Scarcely had the Division dug itself into the rocky Stalingrad soil, scarcely had the Divisional Headquarters installed itself in the deep burrows hollowed into the sand cliffs above the Volga, scarcely had the telephone wires been laid and the keys of the wireless transmitter connecting the command posts with the artillery positions across the Volga begun to tap, scarcely had the murk of night given way to

the light of dawn, when the Germans opened fire. For eight hours on end Junkers-87's dived and swooped over the Division's defences; for eight hours on end, without a minute's pause, wave after wave of German aircraft kept coming over; for eight hours on end sirens shrieked, bombs howled, the earth quaked and the remains of brick buildings crashed; for eight hours on end the air was filled with clouds of smoke and dust, and shell and bomb splinters whined their death song. Anyone who has heard the shriek of air heated to incandescence by bombs, whoever has lived through a harrowing ten minutes' raid of German aircraft, will have some idea of what eight hours of intensive bombing by dive planes mean.

For eight hours on end the Siberians fired from all arms at the German aircraft, and something akin to despair must have seized the Germans when from this burning plant wrapped in a dark pall of dust and smoke, rifle volleys stubbornly continued to crack, machine guns to rattle, anti-tank rifles to send out short bursts, and anti-aircraft guns to keep up their even, wicked fire. It would seem that everything living must have been smashed, destroyed, but the Siberian Division that had dug in neither crumpled up nor went to smash; it continued to fire stubbornly, deathlessly. The Germans brought their heavy regimental mortars and artillery into action. The monotonous hiss of mortar bombs and the screaming of shells added their note to the wailing of sirens and the roar of bursting air bombs. And so it continued until nightfall. In grim, brooding silence the Red Army men buried their dead. That was the first day—the house-warming. And all night long the German artillery and trench mortar batteries kept up their barrage. Few people slept.

That night, at Headquarters, Colonel Gurtiev met two old friends whom he had not seen for over twenty years. They had parted as young men, young bachelors, and now they met again—grey-haired and wrinkled. Two of them commanded divisions, and the third—a tank brigade. They embraced each other, and everyone—the chiefs of staff, the adjutants and the majors from the operations department—who was standing around saw tears in the eyes of these grey-headed men.

"How extraordinary! How extraordinary!" they kept exclaiming. And, indeed, there was something majestic and moving in this meeting of youthtime friends at that dire hour, amid the burning factory buildings and ruins of Stalingrad. Their path must have been the right

one, for it had brought them together again in the fulfilment of a lofty and stern duty.

All night long the German artillery thundered, and the sun hardly rose again over the battle-scarred earth when forty dive bombers appeared, and again sirens shrieked, and again a dark pall of dust and smoke rose above the plant, covering the ground, the shops and the wrecked railway cars; and even the high factory chimneys were lost in the black cloud. That morning Markelov's regiment came out of its dugouts, shelters and trenches, quit its stone and concrete bunkers, and took the offensive. The battalions moved over mountains of slag, over the ruins of houses, past the granite building of the works office, across the railway track, and through the park in the suburbs. Past thousands of bomb craters they pressed forward, while the German air army released a veritable inferno over their heads. An iron wind struck them in the face and yet they pressed on, and once again a superstitious fear must have seized the enemy: "Were these men marching to the attack, were they mortals?"

Yes, they were mortal men. Markelov's regiment advanced one kilometre, occupied a new position and dug in. Only here, in Stalingrad, do men know what a kilometre means. It means one thousand metres, a hundred thousand centimetres. That night the regiment was attacked by overwhelmingly superior German forces. German infantry battalions and German heavy tanks advanced on the regiment's positions, while German machine guns showered the regiment's position with a hail of lead. Drunken tommy-gunners advanced with the stubbornness of maniacs. The story of how Markelov's regiment held its ground will be told by the dead bodies of the Red Army men, by friends who that night and the following day and again the following night heard the rattle of Russian machine guns and the explosions of Russian grenades. The story of this battle will be told by the mangled and scorched German tanks and the long lines of crosses crowned with German helmets drawn up in platoons, companies and battalions. Yes, they were mere mortals and only a few of them survived, but they fulfilled their duty!

On the third day German aircraft hovered over the Division not for eight, but for twelve hours. They remained in the air even after the sun had set, and from the fathomless blackness of the night sky descended the frenzied shrieks of Junkers' sirens while high-explosive bombs dropped upon the smoking, flaming earth like heavy and fre-

quent blows of a sledge-hammer. From early morning to late at night German guns and mortars battered the Division's defences. The Germans had one hundred artillery regiments in the Stalingrad area. At times they sent over heavy barrages, and at night they kept up a methodical, wearing fire. They were supported by trench mortar batteries. This was the line of the main drive.

Several times a day the German guns and mortars suddenly fell silent, and the shattering action of dive bombers ceased. A tense silence would set in. At such times observers would shout: "Stand by!" and the men in the outposts would reach for incendiary bottles, tank-busters unfastened their canvas cartridge pouches, tommy-gunners wiped their rifles with the palms of their hands, grenade dischargers pulled the grenade boxes closer. These brief moments of silence did not mean a respite. They preceded an attack.

Soon the clank of hundreds of tank tracks and the muffled roar of motors heralded the approach of tanks, and the Lieutenant in command would cry:

"Stand by, comrades. German tommy-gunners are filtering through on our left flank."

At times the Germans came as close as thirty to forty metres from our line, and the Siberians could see their grimy faces, their tattered greatcoats, could hear them shouting threats and taunts in broken Russian; and when the Germans had been driven back, dive bombers would again swoop down on the Division, and guns and mortars would lay down a new barrage with redoubled fury.

Our artillery rendered yeoman service in repulsing the repeated German onslaughts. Fugenfirov, Artillery Regimental Commander, and the commanders of his battalions and batteries were ensconced in the forward positions of the battalions and companies of the Division. Wireless kept them in touch with their units, and scores of powerful long-range guns on the left bank of the Volga breathed in unison with and shared the anxieties, joys and sorrows of the infantry. The artillery performed miracles. It screened infantry positions with a cloak of steel. It made matchwood out of the super-heavy German tanks with which the tank-busters could not cope. Like a sword it mowed down the tommy-gunners who clung to the tank armour, it descended now on the open terrain, now on the secret places of concentration. It blasted ammunition dumps and blew German mortar batteries sky-high. Nowhere in the whole course of the war had the infantry

felt the friendship and the might of the artillery to such an extent as here, in Stalingrad.

In the course of one month, the Germans launched one hundred and seventeen attacks on the regiments of the Siberian Division. There was one awful day when the German tanks and infantry attacked twenty-three times. All twenty-three attacks were repulsed. Every day, except three that month, German aircraft strafed the Division for ten to twelve hours at a stretch. Three hundred and twenty hours of bombing in one month. The Operations Department arrived at a figure of astronomical proportions in calculating the number of bombs dropped on the division by the Germans, a figure with four noughts. A similar figure gives the number of plane flights made by German bombers over our position. And all this on a front of one and a half to two kilometres long. The roar was enough to deafen all mankind: the squall of fire and metal was enough to set fire to and destroy a whole country. The Germans thought they would break the morale of the Siberian regiments. They thought that they had gone beyond the limit of what human hearts and nerves could stand. But strangely enough the men neither flinched, nor went mad, nor did they lose heart, instead they became even more steadfast and cool. These taciturn rugged Siberians grew even grimmer and more taciturn; their cheeks grew hollow, and their eyes stared gloomily. Here, in the line of the Germans' main drive, even during the brief moments of respite, there was no bantering, no singing or accordion playing. The men here were labouring under a superhuman strain. There were times when they went without sleep for all of three or four days, and it was with a catch at his heart that Colonel Gurtiev, the grey-headed Divisional Commander, heard one soldier say to him softly: "We've got everything we need, Comrade Colonel: 900 grams of bread and hot meals brought up in vacuum containers. regularly twice a day, but somehow I don't feel like eating."

Gurtiev liked and respected his men, and he knew that when a soldier says: "I don't feel like eating," it really must be going hard with him. But now Gurtiev had no misgivings. He knew that there was no power on earth that could dislodge his Siberian regiments.

In the course of this battle, his men and officers had acquired great and cruel experience. The defences were stronger and more efficient than ever. In front of the factory shops a regular maze of engineering works had sprung up—dugouts, communication trenches,

rifle pits. Fortifications had been pushed far forward beyond the shops. The men had learned to manœuvre underground swiftly and dexterously—to assemble or disperse, to pass from the shops to the trenches and back by way of the communication trenches, depending on where the enemy aircraft struck their blows or where his tanks and infantry launched their attacks. Underground "whiskers" or "feelers," as the men called them, were set up, and along these the tank-busters got to the German heavy tanks, which had halted some hundred metres from the plant buildings. Sappers mined all the approaches to the plant, carrying the mines under their arms, two at a time. This road from the shore to the plant was six to eight kilometres long and thoroughly raked by German fire. The mines were planted in the darkest hours, just before dawn, and often at a distance of only thirty metres from the fascist lines. In this way approximately two thousand mines were laid under the logs of bombed-out houses, under piles of stones and in shell craters. The men learned how to defend big houses, sending out a solid sheet of fire from the first to the fifth storey. They set up remarkably well-camouflaged observation posts under the very noses of the enemy, made use of craters blasted out by heavy bombs in their defences and the intricate system of gas mains, oil conduits and sewers under the plant structures. Every day saw an improvement in the contact between the infantry and the artillery, until sometimes it seemed that the Volga no longer lay between the guns and the men, that the all-seeing guns which reacted instantaneously to each movement of the enemy, were right beside the platoons and the command posts.

Together with experience came moral steeling. The Division became a perfected and marvellously co-ordinated body. The men themselves were not aware of the psychological changes that had taken place in them during the month they had spent in this inferno, in the forward positions of the great Stalingrad defence lines. It seemed to them that they were just what they had always been. In their rare free moments, they scrubbed themselves in their underground bathrooms, they were brought their hot meals in thermoses as usual, and bewhiskered Makarevich and Karnaukhov, looking like peaceful village postmen, continued to bring newspapers and letters from far-off Omsk, Tiumen, Tobolsk and Krasnoyarsk to the forward position in their leather pouches under enemy fire. As before, the men continued to reminisce about their work as carpenters, blacksmiths and peasants.

They jeeringly dubbed the German six-barrelled mortars "footlers." and dive bombers with their sirens—"screechers" or "musicians." To the German tommy-gunners who threatened them from the neighbouring ruins with shouts of: "Hey, Russians, surrender," they replied with loud guffaws saying to one another: "Those Germans must prefer their lousy water to the Volga." It seemed to them that they had not changed and only a newcomer from the opposite bank would look with respectful awe at these men who no longer knew fear, and for whom the words "life" and "death" no longer existed. Only an onlooker could appreciate the iron strength of these Siberians, their indifference to death, their cool determination to bear to the bitter end the stern lot of men holding a defence line to the death.

Heroism had become routine with them, the "style" of this Division and a habit with its men. There was heroism everywhere and in everything—not only in the exploits of the combatants, but also in the work of the cooks peeling potatoes under the blasting fire of thermite shells. Supreme heroism was displayed in the work of the Red Cross nurses—high-school girls from Tobolsk—Tonya Egorova, Zoya Kalganova, Vera Kalyada, Nadya Kasterina, Lyolya Novikova, and many others who dressed wounds and brought water to the wounded men in the height of battle. Yes, if one were to look with the eyes of an onlooker, heroism would be seen in every gesture of the men of this Division. It would be seen in Khamitsky, the commander of the signallers' platoon, as he sat on a slope near the dugout peacefully reading a novel while roaring German dive bombers pounded the ground. It would be seen in Liaison Officer Batrakov as he carefully wiped his spectacles, placed a report in his despatch case, and set off on a twelve-kilometre tramp through the "Gully of Death" as matter-of-factly and calmly as if he were going for a quiet stroll on a Sunday. It would be seen in tommy-gunner Kolosov who was buried up to his neck in earth and debris when a bomb burst in his dugout and who merely turned his head and winked merrily at Svirin, second in command. It would be seen in Klava Kopylova—the buxom, red-cheeked Siberian Staff typist—who sat down to type an order of the day, was buried under, dug out and moved into another bunker where she continued her typing, but was buried under a second time, dug out again and moved into a third dugout, where she calmly finished typing the order and brought it to the Divisional Commander

for his signature. Such were the people who stood in the line of the main drive.

It is the Germans themselves who know their indomitable persistence best of all.

One night a prisoner was brought into Svirin's dugout. His hands and his face with its stubble of grey beard were absolutely black with filth. The woollen muffler around his throat was a tattered rag. He belonged to one of the spearhead crack units of the German army, had been through all the campaigns and was a member of the Nazi party.

After the usual interrogation Svirin asked him:

"What do the Germans think of the resistance in the area of the plant?"

The prisoner was standing with his shoulder against the stone wall of the dugout.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, and suddenly burst into tears.

Yes, the men who stood in the line of the main drive were real men, their nerves and their hearts held out.

At the end of the third week the Germans launched a determined attack on the plant. Preparations for this attack were conducted on a scale the world has never witnessed before. For eighty hours aircraft, heavy mortars and artillery pounded the Division's defences. Three days and three nights were one long chaos of smoke, fire and thunder. The hissing of bombs, the screeching squall of shells coming from six-barrelled mortars, the howling of the heavy shells, and the long-drawn-out shriek of sirens were ear-splitting enough in themselves. But they only preceded the blasts that followed. The jagged flames of explosions stabbed the air while the piercing scream of shattered metal rent the skies. For eighty hours this kept up. Then the barrage was lifted and immediately, at 5 a.m., German heavy and medium tanks, drunken hordes of tommy-gunners, and infantry regiments came over the top. The Germans succeeded in breaking through to the plant; their tanks roared beneath the walls of the shops; they split up our defences and cut off the divisional and regimental command posts from the forward position. It would seem that deprived of direction the Division was bound to lose its capacity for resistance and that the command posts, having come within direct reach of the enemy's blows, must be destroyed.

But astonishing to relate, every trench, every pillbox, every rifle pit and fortified ruin turned into a stronghold with its own direction

and its own system of communication. Sergeants and privates became commanders, and skilfully and efficiently repulsed the attacks. In this dire and perilous hour, commanders and staff officers turned their command posts into forts and themselves beat off attacks like rank-and-file privates. Chamov repulsed ten assaults. The strapping, red-headed tank commander who had been assigned to defend Chamov's command post, having fired his last round, scrambled out of his tank and held the approaching German tommy-gunners at bay with a shower of stones. The Regimental Commander himself manned a mortar gun. Regimental Commander Mikhalev, the Division's favourite, was killed when a bomb hit his command post. "Our father's been killed," mourned the Red Army men. Major Kushnarov, who replaced Mikhalev, transferred his command post to a concrete main that ran beneath the plant. For several hours Kushnarov, Dyatlenko—his Chief of Staff—and six commanders fought at the entrance to this conduit. They had several cases of hand grenades and with these grenades they repulsed every attack of the German tommy-gunners.

This battle, unparalleled in ferocity, lasted several days. The fight now was not for individual buildings and shops, but for each step of a staircase, for a corner in some narrow corridor, for each machine-tool, for the passageway between them, for the gas main. Not a single man in the Division yielded an inch of ground in this battle. If the Germans did succeed in capturing some spot, it meant that not a single Red Army man had survived there to defend it. All fought like the giant, red-headed tank driver whose name Chamov never learnt, like sapper Kossichenko—who pulled the safety rings from the hand grenades with his teeth, since his left hand had been shattered. It was as if the dead had passed on their strength to the survivors, and there were moments when ten resolute bayonets held an area which had been defended by a whole battalion. Time and again the shops passed from the hands of the Siberians to the Germans, only to be recaptured by the Siberians. The Germans captured a number of buildings and shops.

In this battle the German attacks reached their peak. The onslaught in the line of the main drive reached its highest potential. Just as though they had lifted too great a weight, some spring that had brought their battering ram into action seemed to snap.

The curve of the German pressure began to subside. Three German

divisions, the 94th, the 305th, the 389th, were pitted against the Siberians. The one hundred and seventeen infantry attacks cost the Germans five thousand lives. The Siberians held out against this superhuman strain. In front of the plant lay two thousand tons of scrap metal that had recently been tanks. Thousands of tons of shells and bombs had fallen on the plant grounds and structures. But the Division withstood the pressure. It did not yield its fatal ground. Not once did it look back. It knew that behind it was the Volga, and the fate of the country.

One cannot help wondering how this magnificent stubbornness was forged. It was, of course, compounded of both national character and the realization of a great responsibility, of both rugged Siberian obstinacy and splendid military and political schooling and stern discipline. But I want to mention one other trait that played no little part in this grand and tragic epic—the astonishing morale, the firm attachment that knit together the men of the Siberian Division, and the spirit of spartan modesty typical of the commanders of this Division. It was revealed in trifles, and in their intelligent, quiet efficiency. I saw this affection that bound together the men of the Division in the grief with which they spoke of their fallen comrades. I heard it in the words of one of the men of Mikhalev's regiment who to my question: "How're things going?" replied: "Ekh, how're things going—we've lost our father."

I detected it in the touching meeting between Colonel Gurtiev and Zoya Kalganova, a battalion nurse, when she returned after having been wounded for a second time. "My dear, dear girl, welcome back," he said warmly as he moved forward swiftly with outstretched arms to meet the girl with her wan face and close-cropped head. It was the way a father would greet his own daughter. This affection and faith performed miracles.

It was this affection and faith in one another that helped Red Army men take the place of commanders in the midst of some terrific battle, that helped commanders and men from Headquarters to get behind a machine gun, to fling hand grenades and bottles of incendiary liquid to repulse German tanks attacking command posts.

The women and children will never forget their husbands and fathers who fell on the great Volga sector. These splendid, loyal men can never be forgotten. Our Red Army can honour the sacred memory of those who fell in the line of the enemy's main drive in only one

way that will be worthy of the dead, by an offensive that knows no barrier, an offensive that will liberate our occupied territory. We are confident that the hour of this offensive is nigh.

November 20, 1942
Stalingrad Front

STALINGRAD HITS BACK

THE VOLGA is freezing over. The ice floes crunch and crash, crumble and pile up one on top of the other. That dry crunching sound, so like the shifting of sand, can be heard quite a distance from the bank. The river is almost entirely covered with ice. The broad white belt drifting between the black, snowless banks is relieved here and there by patches of water. The white, Volga ice carries along with it logs and tree trunks. A big black crow perches disconsolately on an icy mound. Even against the dark background of the water its black plumage looks startlingly black. Yesterday, the body of a sailor in a striped jersey floated by here. A passing cargo boat took it off. The corpse was frozen fast to the ice floe. Only with difficulty was the dead man released. It seemed as though the sailor was reluctant to leave the Volga where he had fought and died.

The Volga steamers and barges present a strange sight amidst the ice. The black smoke belching forth from the funnels is caught by the wind, spreads low over the river only to be rent to bits by the jagged, rearing ice piles. The blunt, roomy bows of the barges slowly crush the white belt beneath them; the black stretches of water in the wake of the vessels are soon filmed with ice drifting downstream from Stalingrad. Never before have Volga river-craft operated so late in the year.

"This is our first Polar expedition," the captain of a tugboat said to me. It is no easy matter to navigate the icebound river. Hawsers often snap; the sailors skip from one unsteady ice floe to another, balancing as they chip off the ice crust weighing down the steel cables. The captain, with long hoary moustaches and a weather-beaten face, bellows an order in a gruff voice down the speaking tube. Creaking in every beam, the boat heads for an icebound barge. Regardless of the weather the ferry operates night and day, towing over barges loaded with ammunition, tanks, bread, horses. Upstream, at the city itself, it is fire that crosses the river, the deadly fire of artillery that backs the Stalingrad defences. Here, lower down the

river, the crossing is ice, a crossing that is backing the Stalingrad offensive.

For ninety days the Germans stormed the houses and streets, factories and gardens of Stalingrad. For ninety days our divisions repulsed the unprecedented onslaught of thousands of German guns, tanks and planes. Hundreds of frenzied attacks were beaten off by the troops commanded by Rodimtsev, Gorokhov, Gurtiev and Batyuk. It was their iron will, their stalwart hearts, their blood, shed so profusely, that held Stalingrad against the enemy drive. The ring around our defences closed up tighter and tighter; to maintain connections with the low-lying bank grew more and more difficult; the enemy's blows became more and more stubborn. August was a hard month for the beleaguered city. September was still harder, but in October the onslaught of the Germans reached the height of frenzy. It seemed as though no power on earth could possibly withstand the torrent of fire that raged over the city. But the Red Army men withstood the strain. It is quite possible that this required superhuman strength, but in that hour of peril our countrymen proved to have that superhuman strength. The enemy did not pass the Volga defence line. Then let our offensive be on a par with the defence of Stalingrad; let it be a living, terrible, fiery memorial to those who gave their lives defending the Volga, defending Stalingrad.

Crossing the Volga we pass tugboats towing barges full of Rumanian war prisoners. They are wearing tattered field-green greatcoats and high white caps, stamping their feet and blowing on their frozen fingers.

"Now they've got a sight of the Volga," one sailor remarks. The prisoners stare sullenly at the water and the crunching ice, and their whole appearance indicates that their thoughts are as gloomy as the black wintry waters. All the roads leading to the Volga are choked with war prisoners. On this vast, flat, snowless steppe, one can see them from afar, their white hats bobbing up and down in time to their marching. They pass in columns of two to three hundred men, and in small batches of from twenty to fifty. One column, extending over several kilometres, plods along slowly, a faithful reproduction of every bend and turn in the road. There must be over three thousand prisoners in this column. The convoy consists of a few score Red Army men. Batches of two hundred prisoners are usually escorted by two or three Red Army men. The Rumanians step out with a

will; some of the columns even march in serried ranks, in step. Some of the prisoners have quite a fair command of Russian.

"We don't want war!" they cry. "We want to go home. Down with Hitler!"

The men who escort them remark sarcastically:

"Now that our tanks are in their rear and have cut off all the roads, they're ready enough to shout that they don't want war; they didn't do any shouting before, they fired away, and what's more they ruined our girls in the villages and flogged our old people."

More and more batches of prisoners pass us by, their billycans and flasks rattling, bits of string and wire in lieu of belts, gaudy blankets over their shoulders. Chuckling, the women exclaim: "Like a bunch of Gypsies, those Rumanians are."

General Trufanov's Division began the offensive on a foggy morning. There was a touch of frost in the air. The intense silence which seemed to be even more profound because of the fog was rent at the appointed second by the roar of guns, and the protracted, ominous howl of the Guards' mortar batteries. The barrage had scarcely ceased when our tanks suddenly loomed out of the fog. The heavy machines took the steep inclines of the hills at full tilt, with infantrymen riding on them or following at a run in their wake. The fog obscured the movements of men and machines. All that could be seen from the observation post were the dull flashes of gunfire. The central height was taken by storm by Lieutenant Babayev's battalion. The first to reach the hilltop was Babayev's second in command—Lieutenant Matusovsky—with Lieutenants Makarov and Yolkin and Privates Vlasov, Fomin and Dodokhin following on his heels. Sergeant-Major Kondrashov dashed into an enemy pillbox and laid about him at the machine-gunners with his rifle butt. The Rumanians raised their hands.

When the fog lifted it was possible to see from the command post that the central height, from summit to base, was alive with the grey Russian greatcoats. One after another the Rumanian heavy guns in the hollows and on the opposite slopes were silenced. And when the field telephones began to buzz, and orderlies came dashing up with despatches from the company and battalion commanders reporting that our infantry had taken the three commanding heights by storm—tanks and mobile regiments swept through the breach.

We are moving in the wake of the advancing tanks. The road

is cluttered with Rumanian dead; abandoned guns, camouflaged with dry steppe grass, face eastwards. Horses roam the gullies, dragging broken traces after them; grey wisps of smoke curl up from tanks that have been wrecked by shells; steel helmets with the Rumanian royal coat of arms, hand grenades, rifle cartridges and rifles litter the roads. We pass a Rumanian gun emplacement. A mound of empty. smoke-blackened cartridge shells lies near the machine-gun nest. Scattered pages of letters gleam white on the ground in the communication trenches. The brown soil of the steppe has become brick red with blood. Here too lie rifles with butts that have been shattered by Russian bullets.

The stream of war prisoners continues without end. The prisoners are searched before they are sent to the rear. There is something that is both comic and pathetic about the piles of peasant women's things unearthed in the haversacks and pockets of the Rumanians. Here are old women's shawls and women's earrings, underwear and skirts, children's napkins and brightly-coloured girls' blouses. One soldier had twenty-two pairs of woollen stockings in his possession; another—four pairs of dilapidated women's galoshes. The further we go the greater the number of abandoned trucks and guns. More and more frequently we meet caravans of trophy trucks and cars being despatched to the rear. Here are heavy trucks and streamlined baby cars, armour-plated transport trucks and light staff cars.

We reach Abganerovo—a railway junction. An old peasant woman tells us about the three months of German occupation here:

"The whole place has been stripped clean. Hens don't cackle any more, roosters don't crow. Not one cow left. We have nothing to turn out to pasture of a morning or to drive home from the fields of an evening. Those thieving Rumanians robbed us of everything. All the old folks here were flogged—some for not showing up for work, others for not handing over grain. At Plodovitaya, the elder was flogged four times. They took my son, a cripple, and sent him off somewhere, and his little girl and nine-year-old boy too. Four days, already, I've been crying my eyes out. God alone knows where they are now."

Abganerovo is full of trophies. Here are scores of heavy guns and hundreds of field guns—the muzzles pointing in different directions as though gaping in bewilderment. Here, too, are columns and columns of captured trucks with the badges of various divisions and

women's names inscribed on the sides in flourishes and curlicues. The railway tracks are congested with trains captured by our troops. The Germans had already managed to change the gauge. Many of the freight cars in the jumble bear the names of various cities and countries seized by the Hitleries. Here are French cars and Belgian cars and Polish cars; but no matter in what language the inscription, all have the black eagle of the Empire stamped on the side—the symbol of slavery and oppression. Here are freight trains loaded with flour, maize, mortar bombs and shells, fats in big rectangular tins, cars with *ersatz* felt boots with thick wooden soles, lambskin caps, technical appliances and searchlights. The Red Cross vans, with the rough bunks spread with filthy ragged covers, have a dismal and dreary look. Red Army men puff under the weight of the paper *ersatz* sacks of flour which they carry out of the freight cars and load onto trucks. Every sack has an eagle stamped on it in the blackest of ink.

In the evening we continue on our way. Troops are moving up. Black anti-tank rifles bob up and down; guns hauled by small, powerful cars dash by; tanks clatter along the roads; cavalry regiments pass us by at a canter. A bitterly cold wind whistles and moans over the steppe, driving the dry, crisp, powdered snow in our faces. The faces of the Red Army men are a ruddy tan from the keen winter wind. It is no easy matter to fight in weather like this, to spend the long winter nights in the steppe, exposed to the piercing blast which penetrates to the very bone. But the men press forward cheerfully, courageously, to the refrain of a rousing song.

This is the Stalingrad offensive.

The morale of the troops is beyond compare. The whole army—from general to the rank-and-file soldier—is fully aware of the grave responsibility and the great importance of what is happening. A spirit of stern, sober efficiency marks the actions of the commanders. Headquarters know no rest. All conception of night and day has vanished. The work of the superior command and the chiefs of staff proceeds smoothly, competently, vigorously. Terse orders are given in quiet voices.

We have won a great victory, a victory that is beyond doubt, but one thought fills every mind—the enemy has been surrounded, he must not be allowed to slip through our fingers, he must be destroyed. And the men on the Stalingrad front are devoting their every

thought and their very lives to accomplish this. We are confident that the Stalingrad offensive will be a worthy counterpart of the great Stalingrad defence.

November 28, 1942
Stalingrad

MILITARY COUNCIL

WHENEVER I enter a dugout or any other underground shelter occupied by our fighting men I am seized with a fervent desire to preserve for all time the remarkable features of this inimitable way of life and its setting: the crude wick lamps and stove pipes made of empty artillery shell cases; the drinking vessels made of shell heads standing next to a crystal goblet; the queer old-time porcelain ashtray with the inscription: "Wife, Humour Thy Husband" beside an anti-tank grenade; the huge frosted electric globe in the commander's office, and the smile on Chuikov's face when he said: "Ah, yes, the chandelier. This is a city after all"; the volume of Shakespeare in General Gurov's underground office with the steel-rimmed spectacles resting on the open page; the photographs in an envelope with the words "To Daddy" on it lying on a map scored heavily in red and blue; the underground office of General Krylov with the fine writing desk, seated at which the Chief of Staff did such fine work; all those samovars and gramophones, pale blue sugar bowls and round mirrors in wooden frames hanging on the clay walls of the dugout—familiar peacetime objects rescued from flaming buildings; the piano at the command post of the machine-gun battalion on which the men played to the accompaniment of the thunder of the German offensive; and, last but not least, the fine quality of relationships, the simplicity and frankness of men bound by ties of blood, memories of the slain, the sweat and anguish of the Stalingrad battles.

When the Commander of the 62nd Army speaks to a runner and a runner to the Commander, when the telephone operator comes into the Chief of Staff's office to test the phone, when Divisional Commander Batyuk gives an order to a Red Army man or when a company commander reports to Regimental Commander Mikhailov about the battle the night before, there is in every word, gesture and glance a

calm dignity, a manner of behaviour compounded of that iron discipline which impels a thousand men to go into a deadly assault at the utterance of a single word of command and the brotherhood and spiritual equality of all men of Stalingrad, generals and soldiers alike. This manner of behaviour, this quality of relationships should not be forgotten by those who will write the history of the Battle of Stalingrad.

The Stalingrad epic has been described many times. It is to the eternal glory of our men, a tribute to their courage, their endurance, their devotion and self-sacrifice.

Among the many factors contributing to the success of our defence a place of honour belongs to the skilful leadership of the 62nd Army. Our readers ought to know about it. Chuikov, the Commander-in-Chief, member of the Military Council Gurov and Chief of Staff Krylov were not only the military leaders of the operation, they were also the spiritual prime movers of Stalingrad's defence. It required more than great military skill, iron will and stern resolution to command the 62nd Army. One had to be in it heart and soul. And the stern orders issued during those memorable October days were often dictated by the heart as well as the brain. They seared the hearts and minds of men like flames, inspiring them to superhuman exploits of courage and endurance, for in those days human exploits were not enough for the solution of the problems that confronted the fighting men of the 62nd Army.

The Military Council of the army shared with the men all the rigours of the defence. Eight times the Commander of the army shifted his command post. Anyone who was in Stalingrad at the time knows what it meant to shift a command post in those days. It meant exposure to heavy bombs and close-range tommy-gun fire. Forty staff workers were killed by mortar fire in the dugouts of the Military Council. There was one terrible night when thousands of tons of burning oil escaped from tanks blown apart by German shells and rushed in the direction of the dugout of the Military Council. The flames leapt to a height of 800 metres. The fiery stream poured into the Volga, setting the river ablaze. The earth was in flames, a scorching cascade poured down the steep embankment. General Krylov, who had been working quietly in his dugout was unaware of what was happening until the last minute and was brought through the conflagration in the nick of time. All night long the Military Council

stood on a narrow strip of land by the river's edge surrounded by an inferno of roaring black flame. Rodimtsev, Commander of a Guards Division, sent his men to the spot. They returned with the report that the Military Council had gone. "Gone where?" they were asked. "To the left bank?" "No," was the reply, "closer to the firing lines."

There were days when the Military Council was closer to the enemy than the divisional and even regimental command posts. The dugouts shook so violently that they might have been in the epicentre of a devastating earthquake. The stout logs supporting the roof bent like twigs and the earth heaved underfoot. Beds and tables had to be attached to the floor, as is done on shipboard in rough weather. Sometimes the crockery on the tables would fall to pieces from the incessant vibration. Radio transmitters refused to work as hour after hour of bombing put the tubes out of commission. The ear ceased to react to the din, instead it seemed that two steel needles were piercing the eardrums and pressing painfully on the brain. So much for the days. At night when the bombing died down, Army Commander Chuikov, his map spread out before him, issued orders to his divisional commanders. Gurov, calm and friendly, would make the rounds of the divisions and regiments. Krylov pored over maps, tables and plans, writing reports, checking thousands of figures, and thinking. And all would glance at the clock and sigh: "Soon the sun will be up and pandemonium will break loose again."

Those were the conditions under which the Military Council of the 62nd Army worked. I once asked Chuikov what he considered the worst aspect of that battle. He replied without hesitation:

"The occasions when our communication with the forces were disrupted. Picture it for yourself. There were days when the Germans cut all our wire communications with the divisions, and the radio stopped functioning as a result of the vibration. You send out a liaison officer and he gets killed. You send out another and he gets killed too. Everything is roaring and crashing about you, and you have no means of communication. That waiting for nightfall when you could finally get in touch with the divisions was terrible. For me there was nothing worse than that feeling of being cut off from everything."

It was a long night in December. As we talked Chuikov paused now and again to listen.

"Quiet, isn't it," he said, then added laughingly: "I miss the racket, honestly I do."

He is a tall man with a large, swarthy and somewhat puffy face, a large hooked nose, full lips, curly hair and a powerful voice. The son of a Tula peasant, Chuikov for some reason reminds one of a Russian general of the period of the Napoleonic wars. Once upon a time he had made spurs in a Petrograd workshop; silver spurs had been his specialty. At the age of 19 he had commanded a regiment during the Civil War and had been in the army ever since.

For him the defence of Stalingrad was more than a military problem, notwithstanding its vast strategic importance. For him there was also something romantic about the battle, he sensed the grim and rugged beauty of the titanic contest. For him the Battle of Stalingrad was also a glorious moment of supreme triumph for the Russian infantry. And indeed, when the German air forces and tanks, artillery and mortars concentrated by von Bock, Todt and Paulus for the main blow crashed down on our line of defence, when the thick black smoke blotted out the sun and the granite foundations of buildings crumbled like sand, when walls shook from the vibration of tank motors and it seemed that no living thing could survive in this hell—the immortal Russian infantry rose from its trenches and foxholes and struck back.

The Russian infantryman stood up to the combined mechanized force of the German army, and Chuikov, for whom this blood-soaked earth was more precious and beautiful than the gardens of paradise, said: "What! Retreat, after shedding so much blood, after rising to such heights of glory? Never!" He taught his commanders to adopt a calm and sober attitude to the enemy. "The devil," he said, "is not so black as he is painted," although he knew that there were days when the German devil was very black, especially in the direction of the main thrust. He knew how important it was to appraise the enemy correctly. "To overestimate the enemy's strength is harmful." he would say, "to underestimate it is dangerous." He spoke to his commanders of the pride of a Russian soldier, he said that it was better for an officer to lose his head than to bow to a German shell in front of his men. He believed implicitly in the cool-headed courage of the Russian soldier. And with panicmongers and cowards he was merciless.

Major-General Krylov shared Chuikov's faith in our infantry.

His complex calculations and forecasts were based on this faith. It had been his lot to be Chief of Staff of the army that defended Odessa all through the fighting for that city, then Chief of Staff of the heroic army that held Sevastopol for seven months, and finally Chief of Staff of Stalingrad's 62nd Army. This calm, thoughtful man with his quiet deliberate manner of speaking, unhurried movements and gentle smile was perhaps the most experienced of all the generals in the world in the defence of cities.

General Krylov accumulated his grim experience amid roaring fires and the thunder of explosions. He taught himself to work methodically, to fathom out complex problems, to divine the intentions of the enemy, to work out in detail manœuvres and plans under conditions in which no scholar would have been able to concentrate for a moment.

In Stalingrad he sometimes felt that the Battle of Sevastopol had not yet ended but was continuing here, that the thunder of Rumanian guns on the approaches to Odessa was merging with the roar of the German dive bombers that hammered at Stalingrad's plants. In Odessa the fighting took place some fifteen to eighteen kilometres from the city proper, in Sevastopol it moved up to the outskirts of the city, here it was being fought in the city itself, on its squares and streets, in its backyards and houses, in its factory shops. The fighting here was as intense as at Sevastopol, but the scale, the masses of fighting men involved, were immeasurably greater. And here the battle was finally won. It seemed to Krylov that this was a victory not only for the Stalingrad army but for Odessa and Sevastopol as well.

What had been the enemy's tactics in all three battles? In all three operations the Germans had employed the method of consistent methodical gnawing at our defences, splitting up our combat formations and destroying and crushing them piecemeal whenever they were able to break them up. These blows depended for success on mechanical power, on the massed employment of concentrated materiel, on overwhelming the opponent with sheer preponderance of strength. From the military standpoint there was nothing wrong with such tactics. On the contrary, they were the correct tactics, but they had one organic defect which the Germans were unable to avoid—the discrepancy between the power of engine and armour plate and the weakness of its infantry. Into this gap the splendidly armed staunch and valorous

Russian infantry divisions defending Stalingrad thrust themselves like a wedge of steel. At Odessa Krylov realized fully what a colossal force this was, he tested its potentialities in Sevastopol and now he helped it to triumph in Stalingrad on the banks of the Volga.

If the men who commanded the 62nd Army should chance to meet the commanders of the Stalingrad divisions a quarter of a century hence they most likely will greet one another like brothers. Old men by then, they will embrace, brush away a furtive tear and plunge into reminiscences of the great days of Stalingrad. They will remember Bolvinov who was killed in action and whom his men loved dearly because he quaffed the soldier's bitter cup to the dregs, Bolvinov who, belting himself with grenades, crawled over to the field patrol and said to the men: "Can't be helped, boys. Hold the fort." They will recall how Zholudev when he was buried with his staff in a dugout began to sing: "Ho, ho, brothers, life is good!" They will remember Rodimtsev and recall how on the day his division crossed the Volga, staff officers from Army Headquarters manned tanks and helped to protect the bridgehead. They will remember how Gurtiev and his staff were buried in a cave by exploding shells and how friends dug them out. They will remember how a heavy German shell barely missed Divisional Commander Batyuk as he was on his way to report to the Army Commander and how Batyuk had shaken his head and walked on, his hand thrust inside his greatcoat, when the shell failed to explode. They will recall how General Gurtiev telephoned to his friend General Zholudev and said: "Courage, friend, I am unable to help you." They will remember how Gorishny and Lyudnikov met on the frozen river bank.

They will remember many things. And, of course, they will remember how Chuikov ruled with a firm hand and how hot they felt under the collar not only en route to the Commander-in-Chief's dugout but in the dugout itself. Yes, there will be a great deal to remember. It will be a joyous, triumphant meeting. But it will be touched with sadness too, for many will be absent, many who will never be forgotten. And neither army nor divisional commanders will ever forget the great exploits of the Russian fighting man who so generously shed his blood in defence of his country.

December 29, 1942
Stalingrad

THE STALINGRAD ARMY

THE ROAD to the Battalion runs along a railway line crowded with freight cars standing in the newly-fallen snow. We are walking over a vacant lot pitted with bomb and shell craters. Ahead of us, on the hill, looms the water towers where the Germans are ensconced. The area is in full view of the German snipers and observers. But the slim Red Army man in the long greatcoat walking unhurriedly beside me is quite at his ease.

"They can see us all right," he drawls. "There was a time when we used to crawl along here, at night, but things are different now: they're sparing their cartridges and bombs."

Changing the subject suddenly he asks me whether I play chess, and goes on to explain that he is a first category chess-player and was about to have received the title of maestro when the war broke out. Never before had I discussed this abstract and noble game with the feeling that Germans were watching me and counting their bullets. I reply rather absently for I am too busy wondering whether the Germans sheltered in the concrete towers will really spare their ammunition. But the closer we come to the towers the less visible they become until finally they dip out of sight behind the crest of the hill.

The path leads us through one of the wrecked shops of a huge Stalingrad plant. We pass great mounds of rusty scrap iron, huge ladles for pouring steel, steel plates and shattered walls. The Red Army men are so accustomed to the devastation here that they do not pay the slightest attention to it. On the contrary, their interest is more likely to be roused by a window that has survived in a wrecked works' office, by a tall chimney undamaged by shells, or by a little wooden house that by some miracle has escaped destruction.

"Look at that house! It's still alive and kicking," they say with a smile as they pass.

And indeed these rare evidences of a life of peace are strangely moving in this kingdom of destruction and death.

Battalion Headquarters are located in the basement of a large four-storey building, part of a huge industrial plant. This is the westernmost point of our Stalingrad front. Like a promontory it juts into the midst of houses and structures occupied by the Germans. In spite of the enemy's nearness the Red Army men go about their business calmly and leisurely. Two men are sawing wood, while a third is

splitting logs. A couple of Red Army men pass with thermos containers. Another is sitting in the shadow of a half-wrecked wall, industriously fixing a damaged mortar and humming a tune. Like a skilled craftsman at his bench he pauses now and then to ponder some detail of his work, then takes up the tool and goes at it again, humming under his breath.

The building bears traces of the frightful havoc wrought by the Germans. All around it are huge pits gouged out by German "half-tonners." Concrete walls and ceiling have been smashed by direct hits of aerial bombs. The iron fixtures, wrenched by the force of the blasts, hang and sag like a flimsy fishing net gnawed by the teeth of a giant sturgeon. The western wall has been knocked to atoms by long-range guns; the northern wall succumbed to a sextuple mortar. Light shells and mortar bombs have nibbled pieces out of the other walls. Nevertheless, out of the metal and stone pulverized by the German fire, the Red Army men have erected new walls with long, narrow embrasures. This ruined fortress has not surrendered. It has remained the outpost of our defences and is now supporting our offensive with its fire.

Today, as yesterday, fierce fighting rages here. In several spots the Battalion trenches are no more than twenty yards from the enemy. The sentry can hear the Germans walking about in their trenches, the cursing when the rations are issued, and all night long the tramp of the German sentry's feet, as he paces back and forth in his tattered boots. Everything here is under fire, and every stone is a target. The place is teeming with snipers and in these deep, narrow trenches where the men have built themselves dugouts, installed stoves with flues made of cartridge cases, where they swear roundly at the comrade who is shirking his share of wood chopping, where they smack their lips as they dip their wooden spoons into the soup that has been brought up in thermos containers through communication trenches—here, the tension of this battle to the death never abates day or night.

The Germans are fully aware of the importance of this sector in their system of defences. If one raises one's head even the fraction of an inch above the edge of the trench, the shot of a German sniper cracks out. They are not sparing with their cartridges here.

But the frozen, stony soil into which the Germans have dug themselves deep cannot save them. Pickaxes and spades ring day and

night as our men press forward step by step, breasting the earth, drawing closer and closer to the commanding height. And the Germans feel that the hour is near when neither sniper nor machine-gunner will avail them. And this sound of the pickaxe strikes terror into their hearts, and they long for it to stop, if only for a minute.

"Russ, have a smoke!" they shout.

But the Russians do not reply. Suddenly the clatter of pickaxes and spades vanishes in the thunder of explosions: the Germans are trying to drown out the sound of the relentless labour of the Russians in the blast of bursting grenades. In reply, grenades fly from our trenches as well. But scarcely does the smoke disperse and the thunder die down than the ringing of spades and picks smites the ears of the Germans again. No, this soil will not safeguard them against death. This soil is their death. The Russians are coming closer and closer every hour, every minute, cutting their way through the flinty hardness of the wintry soil.

...Again we are in Battalion Headquarters. Through a wrecked wall on which still hangs the sign: "Please close the door. Fight against flies," we pass into the deep basement. On a table stands a shiny brass samovar. Red Army men and commanders are resting on spring mattresses which they have hauled over from gutted homes in the neighbourhood.

Captain Ilgachkin, the Battalion Commander, is a tall, thin young man with black eyes and a high, dark forehead. He is a Chuvash by nationality. In his face, in his fiery eyes and sunken cheeks, in his speech one feels the dogged Stalingrad determination. He himself says:

"I have been here since September. And now I think of nothing but that hill: from the moment I get up in the morning until night. And even when I'm asleep, I see it in my dreams." Excitedly he bangs his fist on the table and says: "And I'll take it, by heavens, I'll take it! The plan is flawless. There can be no mistake."

In October he and Private Repa were fired by another idea: to bring down a Junkers-87 with an anti-tank rifle. Ilgachkin made a number of fairly complicated calculations, taking into account the muzzle velocity of a bullet and the average speed of an aeroplane and drew up an aim correction table. An amazingly ingenious and simple "anti-aircraft installation" was set up. They drove a stake into the ground and fixed a cart-wheel on it. Then they attached an anti-tank

rifle to the spokes of the wheel by its supports with the barrel lying between the spokes. With this contraption Repa, gaunt and melancholy as ever, brought down three Junkers-87 dive bombers.

Now Vassili Zaitsev, the famous Stalingrad sniper, has taken an interest in the anti-tank gun. He has fitted it with a telescopic sight from a sniper's rifle. He aims to knock out German machine-gun nests by planting bullets square in the loopholes. And I am sure that he will do it. Zaitsev himself is a man of few words. "Our Zaitsev," they say in the Division, "is well-bred and modest; he's already done for two hundred and twenty-five Germans." He is very much respected in the city. They call the young snipers whom he has trained "Zaichata" [Zaitsev is derived from *zayats* which means "rabbit" in Russian. *Zaichata*—"bunnies"] and when he addresses them and asks: "Am I right?" they all answer in chorus, "Quite right, Vassili Ivanovich, quite right." Just now Zaitsev is consulting with the engineers, making drawings, and jotting down figures.

Here in Stalingrad one frequently comes across people who not only put all their heart and soul into the war but all the force of their intellect as well. I have met any number of colonels, N.C.O.'s, rank-and-filers all busily engaged day and night figuring, estimating, making working drawings, just as if they felt in duty bound not only to defend the city with their lives, but to devise some invention, to engage in research work here in these cellars of the city in the spacious laboratories of whose institutes and factories brilliant professors and engineers recently worked.

The Stalingrad army is fighting in the city and in factories. And just as the directors of the huge Stalingrad plants and the secretaries of the District Party Committees once took pride in the fact that it was in their particular establishment or district rather than in some other that this or that famous Stakhanovite was working, so, now, the divisional commanders are proud of their outstanding fighters. Laughingly Batyuk checks them off on his fingers:

"The best sniper, Zaitsev, is with me; the best mortar-gunner, Bezdidko, is with me; the best gunner in Stalingrad, Shuklin, is also in my unit."

And just as every district of the city once had its own traditions, its own character, its own peculiar features, so, now, the various Stalingrad divisions, all equal in glory and services rendered, differ from one another in many peculiar features and characteristic details.

We have already described the traditions of Rodimtsev's and Gurtiev's Divisions. In Batyuk's gallant Division there is an air of kindly Ukrainian hospitality, of good-natured chaff. They like to tell here of how Batyuk was standing near a dugout while German mortar bombs were whizzing by one after another into a gully near the Chief of Artillery, who was trying to get out of his underground quarters, and how he jokingly corrected the aim:

"Two yards to the right. One yard to the left! Hey, Chief, look out!"

They also like to poke fun at Bezdidko, the famous virtuoso on the heavy mortar. And Bezdidko, who doesn't know what it means to miss and who places every bomb within an inch of its mark, laughs and fumes. And Bezdidko himself, a man with a soft, lilting tenor and a shrewd Ukrainian smile, with 1,305 Germans to his credit, good-naturedly rags Battery Commander Shuklin, who with a single gun crippled fourteen tanks in the course of one day:

"The only reason he fired from one gun is that he only had one gun to fire from!"

Here, in the Battalion, they like to joke, to tell funny stories about one another. They tell about sudden night encounters with the Germans; how they catch German grenades on the fly and throw them back into the German trenches; tell how they "played tunes" on their six-barrelled mortar, landing all six bombs square in the German bunkers; tell how a huge fragment of a ton bomb, which could easily have killed an elephant, flew by and cut like a razor through the greatcoat, quilted jacket, tunic and undershirt of a Red Army man without even scratching him. And in telling these stories the men laugh so heartily that you find yourself laughing with them.

The company trench mortars are in an adjoining sector of the factory basement. From here they fire, from here keep watch on the enemy; here they sing, eat and listen to the gramophone.

A slender sunbeam penetrated through the shutter over the basement window. Slowly the beam crept over the foot of a bed, skimmed ever the boot of the man lying there, played on a metal button of his greatcoat, crawled on to the table and cautiously, as if fearing an explosion, brushed past the hand-grenade lying beside the samovar,

It crept higher and higher, which meant that the sun was setting and the winter night setting in.

Usually they say: "Quiet night." But this night could not have been called quiet. First there was a long-drawn-out howl, and then came the sound of heavy and frequent explosions, at which the men in the cellar remarked: "The sextuple's on the war path again." This was followed by equally heavy explosions and then a protracted and distant boom. Several seconds later came a single blast. "That's our long-range gun from the opposite bank," someone said. And even though the firing kept up all the time and the onset of evening in the dark cold cellar could be observed only by the fact that the sunbeam had crept high up and was already passing over the sooty ceiling, this was really a quiet evening.

A Red Army man wound up the gramophone.

"What shall I put on?" he asked.

Immediately several voices answered:

"Put on our record, you know."

And here a strange thing occurred. While the Red Army man was looking for the record, I thought to myself: "How nice it would be to hear my favourite 'Irish Drinking Song' in this gloomy, half-ruined basement." Picture my surprise and pleasure when a moment later the strains of Beethoven's song flowed from the gramophone.

Evidently, this song was a favourite among the men, too, for they encored it at least ten times.

The effect of the words and of this simple yet brilliant piece of music was inexpressibly powerful here. A man on active service experiences many emotions, passionate, joyful and bitter; he knows hatred and longing, knows sorrow and fear, love, pity, vengeance. But I have seldom seen wistfulness among men at war. Yet in these words, in this music of a grieving heart, in this humble, half-humourous request, there was an expression of profound and inexpressibly moving wistfulness.

And here, as never before, I delighted in the great power of true art, in the fact that soldiers who had been face to face with death for three months in this devastated, ravaged but unsurrendering building were listening to a Beethoven song as solemnly as if they were attending a church service.

The strains of this song in the gloom of the cellar evoked solemn and vivid recollections of scores of men who were defending Stalin-

grad, men who personified the grandeur of the people's spirit. I recalled Sergeant Vlassov, grim and unrelenting, holding the crossing. I recalled sapper Brysin, handsome, swarthy, fearless and bold, fighting one against twenty in an empty two-storey house. I recalled Podkhanov who refused to be sent back across the Volga when he had been wounded. When the fighting began, he had crawled out from underground where the ambulance company was quartered, had crept up to the frontline and opened fire. I recalled how Sergeant Vyruchkin, under raking enemy fire, had dug into the debris under which Divisional Headquarters—at the Tractor Plant—was buried. He had dug away with such passionate fury that he had actually foamed at the mouth and he had to be dragged away for fear that he would drop dead from the superhuman effort. I recalled how several hours earlier, this same Vyruchkin had jumped into a burning truck loaded with ammunition and extinguished the flames. And I remembered that General Zholudev, the Divisional Commander, had been unable to express his gratitude to Vyruchkin because the brave Sergeant had been killed by a German mortar bomb. Perhaps he had inherited the noble tradition of his ancestors to rush, heedless of danger, to the rescue of those in distress. Perhaps that is why his family bore the name of Vyruchkin [from the Russian verb *vyruchat*, meaning "to rescue"].

I thought of Volkov of the Pontoon Battalion. With a smashed collarbone, he had made his way thirty kilometres from the hospital to the river crossing, crawling most of the way and with an occasional lift from a passing car. I remember how he wept when they sent him back to the hospital. I thought of the men who had been burned to death in one of the Tractor Plant houses; they had refused to leave the burning building and had kept up their fire to the last round. I thought of the men who had fought for the Barricades Plant and for Mamayev Hill, the men who had lived through the German panzer attack in the "Sculpture Gardens," recalled the battalion which had perished to a man, from the commander to the very last private, in defence of the Stalingrad railway station. I recalled the broad beaten track leading to the fishermen's settlement on the bank of the Volga —a road of glory and death; thought of the silent columns marching along it in the stifling dust of August, in the moonlit nights of September, in the drizzling rains of October, in the snow of November. They had marched with a heavy step—anti-tank men, tommy-gunners, infantrymen, machine-gunners—had marched in grim and solemn

silence, and the only sound that had come from them was the clank of their weapons and the ringing of the ground under their measured tread.

And suddenly I recalled a letter written in a childish hand, a letter lying beside a Red Army man who had been killed in a blockhouse. "Good morning, or maybe I should say good evening. How are you, Daddy? I'm terribly lonesome without you. Home is not home without you. Do come and visit us even if it's only for an hour. I'm writing and my tears are just pouring down. This is your daughter Nina writing."

And I recalled this fallen Daddy. Maybe he had been reading the letter as he felt death approaching, and the crumpled sheet had remained there beside his head....

How can I convey the emotion I felt in that hour in the dark basement of the plant that had not surrendered to the enemy, as I sat there listening to the solemn and melancholy song and gazed at the stern and pensive faces of the men in Red Army greatcoats!

January 1, 1943
Stalingrad

STALINGRAD FRONT

ON AUGUST sixth Colonel-General Yeremenko took over the command of the forces of the Stalingrad front. Those were days of pain and bitterness. A pitiless sun hung over the steppes, its great red disc hazy behind a pall of fine dry dust raised by thousands of Red Army boots, the wheels of carts, and the treads of tanks and tractors. The dust rose high up in the heavens covering the cloudless sky like a leaden shroud.

The armies were retreating. The faces of the men were dark and gloomy. Dust covered their clothing, their weapons, dust lay thickly on the muzzles of guns, on the tarpaulin that covered the crates of staff documents, on the black polished lids of staff typewriters, on the suitcases, bags and rifles piled carelessly on carts. The dry, grey dust clogged the men's noses and throats. It dried and cracked their lips. Dust penetrated the hearts and souls of the men, it made them restless, it found its way into the arteries and veins and turned their blood grey. It was terrible, that dust, the dust of retreat. It corroded

the fine metal of faith, it dampened the fires that burned in valiant hearts, it dimmed the vision of the gunners. There were moments when the men forgot their duty, their strength, their formidable weapons and they felt their senses reel. German tanks rumbled over the roads. German dive bombers hovered day and night over the Don, Messerschmitts swooped down on our supply trains. Smoke, fire, dust and suffocating heat.

At times it seemed to the men that there was no oxygen in this fœtid air which they inhaled through cracked lips, they felt the dry grey dust was choking them. In those days the faces of the marching men were as bloodless as the faces of the wounded who lay in the jolting trucks.

In those days the marching men felt the same urge to groan and complain as those who lay swathed in bloodstained bandages on straw pallets in village huts awaiting the ambulances. The great army of a great nation was in retreat.

The first motor convoys of the retreating army entered Stalingrad. Down the broad thoroughfares of the city, past the plate-glass windows of shops, past the soft drink stands painted a pale blue, past bookstores and toyshops rolled truckloads of grey-faced wounded, front-line trucks with dented fenders and shell-torn sides, staff cars with jagged cracks on windshields, cars covered with the dust and mud of the war roads, bringing the hot breath of war into the city and becoming part of its being.

Alarm crept into the faces of the townsfolk. Outwardly everything seemed as usual and yet everything was changed. But the mighty factories continued to spew forth black smoke. Stalingrad industry worked day and night. The Barricades and the Stalingrad Tractor Plants became the arsenal of the Stalingrad front, and every night artillery regiments and tank battalions brought into being by an all-out effort on the production line moved toward the front to replace those that were being crippled in the bitter, unequal struggle, to replace those destroyed at Kotelnikovo and Kletskaya and those lost in action at river crossings.

The war was coming down on Stalingrad. The city girded itself to meet the impact. Defence plans were drawn up at Staff Headquarters. Crossroads and city gardens where lovers had held their trysts now acquired new meaning either as tactically advantageous or untenable, as commanding the vicinity completely or partially, as sup-

porting the flanks or reinforcing the centre. Then the war reached Stalingrad. And the lovely steppe lanes lined with wild cherry trees, the gullies and hills bearing names given to them by our great-grandfathers became communication lines, terrain, and heights designated by numbers.

The German Command believed the battering ram they had concentrated for the main thrust was insuperable. They were confident that no force in the world was capable of withstanding Colonel-General Richthofen's air corps, or von Bock's tanks and infantry. They advanced on the Volga and Stalingrad, closing in from Tsymlyanskaya and Kotelnikovo in the south and from Kletskaya in the northwest. For the Germans the taking of Stalingrad and reaching the Volga were a foregone conclusion. They considered it a matter merely of dividing the remaining distance by the average daily advance. And on the basis of this simple arithmetic Hitler announced to the world the date of Stalingrad's capture.

In those dark days of the August retreat, at a time when the heavy air was filled with the roar of Colonel-General Richthofen's air squadrons and the steppelands between the Don and the Volga bent under the weight of tank columns, the marching feet of infantry divisions and the creaking wheels of von Bock's artillery regiments, to this realm of flaming villages, this realm of smoke, flame and dry, hot dust, to this once peaceful land where hell had broken loose, came the commander of the new, Stalingrad front.

The Germans who thought in terms of arithmetical calculations believed that this flaming inferno they had created could evoke nothing but panic, weakness, apathy and disbelief in the favourable outcome of the war for the Russians. They rubbed their hands gleefully: after the long retreat and the heavy losses they had sustained, the Russians, crushed by the weight of their reverses, would never be able to offer serious resistance in this steppe country where camels roamed and the desert loomed, and hence would hardly attempt a stand at the city on the steep bank of the Volga with its broad expanse behind their backs. The Russians knew very well that the great river lay behind them, but they knew also that the fate of their country was to be decided here.

Though worn out by the battles on the Severny Donetz, on the Oskol and the Don, the Russian troops took up positions in front of the city on the Volga and there was no power on earth that could

dislodge them. Whence this strength, how did it come into being? What was the source of this power that held the men steadfast on the Volga cliffs?

The Germans expected that their smashing blow would gain momentum as the days passed. They thought it was a matter of arithmetical progression as it had been in Poland and Holland, in France and Belgium, in Yugoslavia and Greece. There, on the fifth day of the offensive the German columns had moved twice as fast as on the first, and on the tenth day, twice as fast as on the fifth. In Western and Southeastern Europe the Germans advanced like an avalanche sweeping down a mountainside; at Stalingrad their advance was more like the movement of a cart climbing a winding mountain path.

And now I shall tell you of the miracle that came to pass, a miracle founded on great faith in the strength of the people and in the people's love of freedom.

Colonel-General Yeremenko is a massively built, broad-shouldered man of fifty who in spite of his bulk is agile in his movements. When Yeremenko puts on his spectacles to read a paper or to study the map he looks like a village school-teacher relaxing over a book in the schoolroom after class. But when he reaches suddenly for the receiver to order an artillery commander to "intensify fire!" or to "hang on to them, hang on to them like a kite!"; when he issues curt commands to shift several artillery regiments from one sector of the front to another, or when he orders anti-aircraft batteries to straddle a German supply air line just spotted in the steppes, one realizes at once that Yeremenko is not merely the man to take charge of static granite defences, one feels that here is a master of swift and sudden offensive.

Colonel-General Yeremenko is a man of great military experience. He knows soldiering from bottom up; in 1914 he himself took part in a bayonet charge in which he killed twenty-two Germans. He is a General who has risen from the ranks. And when in the midst of directing a complex operation, listening to reports and issuing brief commands, when between talking to a general whose troops have broken through to the enemy's trenches and issuing orders to the forward air units to go into action, he picks up the receiver and sternly enquires why it is taking so long to supply the men with felt boots, you realize that for him war is a grim job of work stripped of all romantic illusions.

"Who wants to die?" he said to me once, chuckling in his old man's way. "No one wants to die."

For Yeremenko war is part of life. The laws of war are the laws of life. There are no mysterious Kantian "things in themselves." Yeremenko's appraisal of the fighting man and the general is founded on sober common sense. He knows the difference in the behaviour of a family man who is prone to complain of his lumbago and that of a headstrong youth who does not pause to consider his actions.

"The best age for a soldier is between twenty-five and thirty," he says. "At that age he does not yearn for a quiet life, he does not think continually of his family, and he has already lost the recklessness of youth. A soldier cannot get along on courage alone, he has to have some experience of life, some ordinary horse sense."

Yeremenko knows the vicissitudes of war, he has experienced them in the course of his long years of army service. One of those who had organized the defence of Smolensk, he had encountered the enemy's main forces before this, had seen the German plans go awry, tempos slow down, and the seemingly inexorable movement of the German tank columns checked for the first time since the outbreak of the great war. And what he saw convinced him of the strength of our defences. He tested the power of our offensive when troops under his leadership broke through the enemy's lines on the Kalinin front and took Peno, Andreapol, Toropets and moved on Vitebsk. But he learned also the bitterness of reverses, realized the treacherous power of the enemy when the Germans broke through at Bryansk and Orel.

He knew how fickle are the fortunes of war, and even at the time of our biggest successes he did not consider the Germans beaten.

The Stalingrad epic was preceded by battles of unparalleled ferocity and heroism in the steppes south of the city. It was from here that the Germans had originally intended to break through to the city, and it was here that they encountered a steel wall of resistance. General Shumilov's forces repulsed the enemy's onslaught on the flat plains which afforded the German air force and tank units ample opportunity for manœuvre. The battles here were nothing like those fought later on in the streets and squares of Stalingrad. The difference was as between night and day. Yet here in the open plains were first manifested that remarkable resolution and self-sacrifice that was later to be the distinguishing feature of the entire great Battle of

Stalingrad. Here in the steppes everything was so different. Things happened that could never happen in the city. For instance, a sentry on duty on the fringe of a mine field once saw a hare dash into the mined section of the plain followed by a bush-tailed red fox. The sentry saw both animals—the pursued and the pursuer—blown to pieces on the mines. He tried to reach them and fell wounded severely by a mine splinter. At that moment German tanks appeared from the far side of the field, skirting the mined area, and the wounded sentry opened rifle fire to warn his comrades of the enemy's approach.

Here in the steppe the Battle of Stalingrad began, here the crews of anti-tank guns commanded by Sergeant Apanasenko and Kiril Hetman repulsed the attacks of thirty heavy tanks; here the Donbas worker Lyakhov wrote his vow before going into attack; here in the steppes KV tanks commanded by Colonel Bubnov fought so valiantly that to this day you can hear stories of this indestructible tank brigade. Here it was that twenty-five of Colonel Denisenko's Guardsmen stormed an enemy-held height. Fifteen survived the first dash forward; six were left after the second; the third spurt cost the lives of three more. Such was the courage of these men that when two of the last three fell dead, the sole survivor of the twenty-five, threw himself forward, reached the crest and taking cover behind a disabled German tank opened machine-gun fire.

Here in the steppe the Germans were stemmed. Unable to get through to the city from the south, they concentrated all their forces at the elbow of the Don, and managed to breach our defences at Vertyachy village. Enemy armour cut through to the northern outskirts of the city not far from the Tractor Plant. That was on August 23, 1942.

The Germans had intended to take possession of the factories, push on to the river and complete the capture of Stalingrad by August 26. It was then that the German forces concentrated on the direction of the main thrust clashed with our 62nd Army. The great battle began, followed breathlessly by the nations of the world.

Lieutenant-General Chuikov took over the command of the 62nd Army at the crucial hour of the Battle of Stalingrad. He reported at Yeremenko's command post, which was located deep underground in the western suburbs of flaming Stalingrad. We do not know what Yeremenko said to Chuikov when he despatched him on his arduous mission. That will remain between the two men.

The commander of the front had known General Chuikov for many years, in peace and in war. He knew of Chuikov's courage, his indefatigable energy, his stubborn resolution; he knew that Chuikov never swerved from his objective. "That man never succumbs to panic," said the commander of the front.

It was a colossal job that fell to the lot of General Chuikov. "Stand to the death!" became his watchword and the device of his aides Gorokhov, Rodimtsev, Guryev, Gurtiev and Batyuk. They demonstrated their loyalty to this device in the unprecedented ordeals of the Stalingrad Battle; so did the commanders of the regiments and battalions, companies and platoons that made up Stalingrad's divisions and so did the tens of thousands of fighting men who would not yield an inch of the ground they set out to defend.

General Chuikov and his assistants shared with the men all the ordeals of those bloody battles. There were no defences in depth in Stalingrad, no distinction between front and rear in this city stretching in a narrow strip along the bank of the Volga for a distance of sixty kilometres. Reduced to a heap of smouldering ruins, Stalingrad had become one vast trench, one huge dugout. And in the midst of this vast trench that was rocked day and night by explosions, in the midst of the blazing fires and the roar of German bombers, were Lieutenant-General Chuikov, Commander of the Army, his generals and colonels who commanded the divisions, and the fighting men, the machine-gunners, sappers, anti-tank gunners, artillerymen and infantry.

For a hundred days and a hundred nights Chuikov and his assistants toiled in this hell. In this hell their staffs went about their tasks calmly and deliberately, in this hell battle plans were drawn up, conferences held, decisions taken, orders drawn up and signed.

In the face of the incredible stubbornness of the 62nd Army the Germans realized that they could not take Stalingrad by advancing along the entire front. So they decided to break up our defences, to strike wedges into the 62nd Army, to split it by sections the way you split a heavy log that defies a single blow of the axe. After tremendous efforts, at the price of enormous losses, they succeeded in driving narrow spearheads into the Volga defences in three places. They believed that these wedges would split up the 62nd Army. But they were mistaken. The wedges were driven in, but the 62nd Army remained as solid and united as before, subordinate to the will of its commander, indestructible, unbreakable, integral. It seemed a miracle:

an army separated from its rear by the Volga swollen by the autumn rains, an army with three heavy German wedges piercing its body continued to fight as a single, smooth-working mighty organism.

What is the explanation for this miracle? The Germans had blundered, the Germans did not understand, were incapable of grasping the inner organic structure of the 62nd Army. They thought that it was a chunk of timber that could be rent asunder by the axe, but instead they found it to be true steel, the steel compounded of tiny microscopic crystals knit together by the mighty force of molecular cohesion. Each of these crystals was steel. There was not, and there never could be a wedge in the world capable of splitting that steel. The protracted retreat had not demoralized our troops as the Germans had expected. In the dust of the steppe roads, in the lurid glare of burning villages, the bitterness, the wrath, the determination to die rather than submit to the will and the evil force of the slave-owning invaders had steadily matured. This stern emotion had become common to all the men at the front, from the Commander-in-Chief to the rank-and-file soldier. It was this emotion that formed the cornerstone of Stalingrad's defence.

Commanders and men alike shared a sense of tremendous responsibility for the fate of the nation. This consciousness permeated the entire spiritual being of the 62nd Army. It was expressed in the way Red Army men, corporals and sergeants, when cut off from their command posts for days at a time, would take over the command themselves and display remarkable competence and intelligence in defending strongpoints, dugouts and fortified buildings. It was this consciousness, which at the critical moment transformed the soldier into the commander, that prevented the Germans from disrupting the smooth-working mechanism of the army as a whole.

The men who fought in the ranks of the 62nd Army joined the great brotherhood of the Stalingrad defence. This brotherhood bound men of different ages and nationalities closer than ties of blood and kinship. To me the symbol of this stern brotherhood is the memory of three wounded men walking slowly and painfully to the dressing station. These three bleeding men walked arm in arm clinging closely to one another, staggering from weakness, stumbling as they went. And when one of them could walk no longer the other two almost carried him between them.

I assumed that they were buddies, that they perhaps hailed from the same town or village.

"No," one of them who had a dirty bloodstained bandage over his eyes, replied in a low, cracked voice. "We are from Stalingrad."

The great force that cemented the men of the 62nd Army was their faith in one another, a faith born of the battles for Stalingrad.

"My first and chief principle in war is a constant and unfailing consideration for the men," says General Yeremenko. "This means primarily placing the troops in the most advantageous conditions vis-a-vis the enemy, to see that they are properly supplied with ammunition, equipment and clothing." Then he laughs and adds: "And, of course, it is important that they have something to eat too, and the hotter and more nutritious the food the better."

This constant care and attention was felt by all the troops of the front. It was felt by the Commander-in-Chief of the 62nd Army too, who invariably received brief encouraging notes from the commander of the front at difficult moments and powerful support from the artillery directly under the commander of the front.

Colonel Gorokhov stationed on the right flank of the 62nd Army was keenly conscious of this solicitude too. For more than two months Gorokhov's forces had been cut off from the right bank communications by two German wedges; they had stood on a narrow strip of land pressed back to the bank of the Volga. And time and again throughout these two months at moments of superhuman tension Gorokhov heard the calm friendly voice and warm greetings backed by the annihilating work of the long-range guns and the Katyushas.

Faith in one another knit together the entire Stalingrad front from Commander-in-Chief to rank-and-filer. This faith was summed up most fittingly by the Red Army man who walked up to the Colonel-General in Stalingrad and said:

"Why, I have known you for a long time, Comrade Commander! I served with you in the Far East."

And if the Red Army men knew their Colonel-General, he knew his men. He always speaks with the greatest respect and affection of the fighting men of the Stalingrad front:

"Here in Stalingrad our Red Army man has demonstrated the strength and maturity of the Russian national spirit."

The enemy did not succeed in smashing our defences at Stalingrad, the noble edifice of the 62nd Army did not crumble under the terrific impact of the battering ram. The powerful forces that united

the molecules of steel proved stronger than the evil that had conquered Europe.

The 62nd Army stood firm and triumphed. The day came when General Chuikov and his assistants Rodimtsev, Gorokhov, Gurtiev and Guryev, gave the order to close in on the German forces surrounded in the Stalingrad area! The day came when the 62nd Army went over from the defensive to the offensive. This offensive, the plan for which was born in those scorching, dusty August days, those anguished suffocating nights when the ruddy glare of the conflagrations that blazed on the Don could be seen on the Volga, when the flames of burning Stalingrad brought the wrath of the Red Army man to white heat, this long-awaited offensive came to pass. The first stage of the Battle of Stalingrad is over. Those were a hundred days the like of which the world has never known. The battle inside the city, a battle in which factory workers coming out of their workshops after the shift saw German tanks pour over the crest of a neighbouring hill to attack our forward formations; the battle in which the armoured cutters of the Volga river fleet gave battle to German tanks on the Stalingrad riverfront; the battle whose mighty wings hovered over the steppeland! There in the steppes hares maddened by the awful din leapt into the trenches into the arms of our soldiers who fondled them, stroked the trembling little beasts tenderly and said: "Don't be afraid, we won't let the Jerries get you!"

The first stage of this battle is over. Colonel-General Yeremenko, reclining on his cot with his wounded leg resting on a pillow is talking briefly over the phone to the commanders of the armies.

The centre of the Stalingrad fighting has shifted from the blackened ruins, from the narrow, debris-heaped alleys and the factory workshops to the wide open spaces of the Volga plains. Yes, the first stage of the great Battle of Stalingrad is over. Deserved honours await its participants. Colonel Gurtiev, Colonel Gorokhov, Colonel Sartsev have been promoted to the rank of general.

Thousands of fighting men and commanders have been decorated.

But the greatest reward for the fighting men and commanders of the Stalingrad front is the eternal gratitude of the people.

In one of the backwaters of the Volga near a Stalingrad factory stood a barge wedged into the ice. In that barge lived 600 workers, their wives, mothers and children awaiting evacuation. One dark, cold evening a man entered the barge-hold. He walked past the dejected old

workmen sunk in gloomy thoughts, past the sad, silent old women, past a young, exhausted woman who had given birth to a son the day before on the cold, damp floor of the hold, past the children sleeping on the piles of bundles. And by the dim light of the kerosene lamp the man began to read aloud from a paper:

"A few days ago our troops stationed on the approaches to Stalingrad launched an offensive against the German fascist forces. . . ."

It was as if a fresh breeze from the Volga had swept the dark, stuffy barge-hold. The people wept. The women wept, the grim metal workers wept, grim-faced old veterans wept. May these tears of gratitude be the people's reward to those who bore the fearful burden of the defence of Stalingrad, those whose blood saved Stalingrad from the enemy.

December 1942.

THIS STORY was told to me by a chance companion, a Captain who was ill with malaria. He was standing on the road in the cold rain, his trench coat over him, his blue lips smiling, his hand raised. Usurov, our driver, stopped the truck. The Captain hoisted himself over the side, and sat down on the filthy wet tarpaulin that covered the mountain of junk our practical Usurov carted around with him: a trophy Italian bed, an empty German shell crate, several old tires, and a pile of empty, rattling twenty-litre oil cans. It was a bad road and hard going for our light truck; the wheels kept skidding and the whole truck sometimes jolted so violently that everyone sitting in the back had to hold on to the sides to keep from falling out. Twice we had to stop when the water began to boil in the radiator. Usurov walked around the truck, kicked the tires, crouched down and peered at the springs, talking his driver's lingo all the time, that sinister mumbo-jumbo that everyone who has ever driven over the frontline roads knows only too well.

On the way, the sick Captain, his teeth chattering with fever, told me this story. Then he said: "Well, here's the evacuation hospital. That's my stop." Major Bova pounded on the roof over the driver's seat and Usurov poked his head out of the window, muttering out of the corner of his mouth: "What's the idea! How can I stop on a slope like this? We've been riding without brakes for more than a month now!" The Captain climbed over the side, thanked us, and holding up the hem of his trench coat, made his way gingerly over the slippery mud to the cottage in the distance.

Usurov got out, stared intently ahead of him and then said pointing: "There's that hill I was talking about, a four hundred metre climb at the very least. At least twenty trucks must have stuck here; even a seven-tonner can't make it, even the American cars can't budge. Just the thing for our Columbine!" He slapped the wet side of the rattletrap truck and suddenly struck up a gay song out of sheer desperation: "Remember when we met and evening shades were falling...." Then he sat down behind the wheel and stepped on the gas.

Here is the story the Captain told us.

I

TWO WEEKS had passed since the small detachment of Red Army men fighting their way through mining villages devastated by war, marched across the Donetz steppe. Twice they had been surrounded by the Germans, twice they had broken through and moved farther east. But this time there was no chance of getting out. The Germans had drawn a close ring of infantry, artillery, and mortar batteries around the detachment.

Contrary to all logic and common sense, as it appeared to the German colonel, they were refusing to surrender. The front was already a hundred kilometres away, and here was this handful of Soviet infantrymen settled in the ruins of the pit-head buildings, still firing away. The Germans pounded them with guns and mortars day and night. It was impossible to close in on them—the Red Army men had machine guns and anti-tank rifles, and were evidently well supplied with ammunition, for they were not sparing of it.

The whole business was becoming a scandal. Army Headquarters sent an irritated, sarcastic, radiogram enquiring whether the colonel needed the support of heavy artillery and tanks. Insulted and chagrined, the colonel sent for his chief of staff.

"You realize," he said, "that defeating this miserable detachment won't bring us any glory, but every hour of its continued existence is a disgrace for me, for each one of you, for the whole regiment."

At dawn, the heavy mortars set to work on the ruins. Heavy yellow-bellied mortar shells sped straight to their objective. It seemed as though every metre of earth had been ploughed up by the explosions. One and a half regular issues of ammunition had been used up, but the colonel gave orders to continue firing. More than that—he brought in the artillery. Great clouds of dust and smoke rose into the air, and the high walls of the building housing the pit-head gear collapsed with a roar like thunder.

"Continue firing!" ordered the colonel.

Stones flew in all directions. Iron girders snapped like rotten thread. Concrete crumbled. The colonel watched this terrible work through his field glasses.

"Don't stop firing!" he repeated.

"We must have sent over fifty heavy mortar bombs and thirty artillery shells for every Russian there," remarked the chief of staff.

"Don't stop firing!" said the colonel stubbornly.

The soldiers were tired and hungry but they were not given time out for either breakfast or dinner. Not until five o'clock in the afternoon did the colonel give the word for the attack. The battalions charged the ruins from four directions. Everything had been prepared —the Germans carried tommy guns, light machine guns, powerful flame-throwers, explosives, hand grenades, anti-tank grenades, knives, and spades. They drew nearer and nearer the ruins, shouting, rattling their arms and roaring to drown their fear of the men in the colliery buildings.

Dead silence met the attackers; not a shot, not a movement. The reconnaissance platoon were the first to break in.

"Hey, you, Russ!" shouted the soldiers. "Where are you, Russ?"

But the stone and iron remained silent. Naturally, the first thought that entered their heads was that all the Russians had been killed. The officers gave orders for a strict search to be made, for the bodies to be dug out and counted.

The search was long and thorough, but not one body was found. In a number of places there were pools of blood or bloodstained bandages and tattered, bloodstained shirts. Four light machine guns that had been wrecked by German shells also came to light, but there was no sign of empty tins or wrappers from food concentrates, or bits of rusk. One of the scouts found a half-eaten mangel-wurzel in a hollow.

The soldiers examined the head workings and found traces of blood leading to the shaft. A rope was hanging from an iron rung of the emergency ladder fastened to the wooden facing of the shaft. Evidently the Russians had descended by the emergency ladder taking their wounded with them.

Three scouts fastened ropes round their waists and let themselves down, grenades ready in their hands. The seam was at no great depth from the surface, for the shaft did not go down more than seventy metres. The scouts hardly reached the shaft bottom, than they began jerking desperately at the ropes. They were drawn up, unconscious and bleeding profusely; but the bullet wounds showed that the Russians were there. It was obvious that they could not hold out long— the half-eaten mangel-wurzel was proof that their food supplies had run out.

The colonel reported all this to his superiors and received another

particularly biting telegram from Army Headquarters; the general tendered his congratulations on the unusually brilliant victory and expressed the hope that within the next few days he would finally succeed in breaking the resistance of the Russians. The colonel was desperate. He realized that the situation was ridiculous.

Thereupon he adopted the following measures. Twice in succession a paper proposing surrender, written in Russian, was let down the shaft. The colonel promised that the lives of those who surrendered would be spared and that the wounded would be cared for. Both times the paper returned bearing the one pencilled word: "No!" Then smoke bombs were tossed down, but evidently the absence of a draught prevented the smoke from spreading through the galleries. Beside himself with rage, the colonel gave orders to round up the women of the mining village and informed them that if the men in the pit refused to surrender, all the women and children would be shot. Then the women were told to pick three of their number to go down and persuade the Red Army men to surrender in order to save the children. If the Red Army men refused, the pit-shaft would be blown up.

The women chosen were Nyusha Kramarenko, a timberer's wife; Varvara Zotova, who had worked on a coal-washer before the war, and Marya Ignatyevna Moisseyeva a woman of thirty-seven and the mother of five children, the eldest of whom was a girl of thirteen. The women asked the Germans to allow Kozlov, an elderly miner, to go down with them, as they were afraid of losing their way since the men had probably withdrawn to the interior of the mine. The old man had offered to act as their guide.

The Germans rigged up a block over the pit-shaft and ran the cable from the wrecked cage through it; to the cable they fastened an ordinary tub such as is used for transporting coal along the tunnels.

The three women were led to the pit-head followed by a crowd of weeping women and children. They themselves were also in tears as they took leave of their children, their relatives, their village and the blessed daylight.

On all sides they could hear the voices of the other women.

"Nyushka, Varka, Ignatyevna!" they cried. "We're depending on you. Talk them into it, my dears. Those damned Germans will shoot us all. We'll be done for, and our children will be murdered: they'll wring their necks like chickens!"

The three women called back through their tears:

"Don't we know it ourselves! We have children too. Olechka, come here, let me take one more look at you! Will we all really have to die because of this lust for blood! We'll drag those crazy men of ours up by the hair! We'll scratch their eyes out, the fools! They ought to realize how many innocent souls will be lost because of them!"

Old Kozlov led the way limping to the pit-head—his left foot had been crushed in 1906 when the roof had fallen in the western gallery. He stumped along, calmly swinging his miner's lamp as he tried to keep ahead of the weeping and wailing women, who spoiled the solemn mood that always overcame him when he went down into the mine. Now, too, he gave free reign to his fancy; he imagined the cage slipping down the pit-shaft, the damp air caressing his face, remembered how he had walked along the quiet tunnel to the coalface with his lamp throwing its light on the trickles of dark water running down the slopes, and the beams covered with greasy, soft coal dust. At the coalface he would take off his jacket and shirt, fold them up, measure the cut and dig into the soft coking coal. An hour later his pal, the safety man, would come to him and ask: "How are you getting on, still digging it out?" And he would wipe off the sweat, smile and answer: "What else would I be doing? As long as I'm alive, I'll be digging it out. Let's sit down and rest for a while." They would sit near the ventilation shaft and set down their lamps, while the stream of air would play softly on their blackened sweating faces, and they would have a leisurely chat about the gas pockets, about the new gallery, about the roof of the main gallery, and joke about the fire boss. Then his pal would say: "Well, Kozlov, I can't be sitting here with you all day," turn up his lamp and get up to go. And he would say: "Get along then, old chap," and himself take up his pick and feel it bite deeply into the soft black coal of the seam. Forty years at the game was no joke!

But no matter how the lame old man hurried, he could not outstrip the women. The air was filled with their cries and weeping.

Soon the group reached the dreary ruins of the pit-head building. Not once had Kozlov been near the place since the day the roly-poly engineer Tatarinov, pale as a ghost, had with his own trembling hands dynamited the pit-head installations he himself had built. That had been two days before the Germans came.

Kozlov looked around him and involuntarily removed his cap. The women were wailing. The fine cold drizzle pricked the skin of the old man's bald head. It seemed to him that the women were bewailing the dead pit, while he himself had the strange feeling that he was again at the cemetery as on that autumn day when he had walked up to his wife's open coffin to take his last farewell.

The Germans were standing around in their capes and greatcoats, talking among themselves and smoking cigars as though all this death and desolation had come of itself.

Only one man, a burly soldier with a pock-marked face and big, swarthy, peasant hands, stared at the ruins of the pit-head gloomily and morosely.

"Looks like he feels for it.... Maybe he used to work in a pit too," thought the old man, "hewer or timberer, perhaps...."

The old man was the first to climb into the tub. Nyushka Kramarenko cried out at the top of her voice:

"Olechka, my little darling, my baby!"

A little girl of about three, her stomach distended from her diet of beets and raw maize, scowled at her mother, as though reproving her for her noisy behaviour.

"I can't do it! My hands are shaking and my legs are giving way under me!" cried Nyushka. She was afraid of the dark ruins, where the soldiers were hidden. "They'll shoot us all! They won't be able to make anything out in the darkness! We'll all be killed down there, and you'll be killed up here! ..."

The Germans pushed her into the tub but she braced her feet against the sides. The old man wanted to help her, but lost his balance and struck his head painfully against the metal. The soldiers burst out laughing, and Kozlov, stung to the quick and furious, shouted:

"Get in, you idiot! You're going down the pit, not to Germany. What're you wailing about?"

Varvara Zotova jumped lightly into the tub. Looking around at the weeping women and children who were stretching out their hands to her, she said:

"Don't be scared, you women! I'll put a spell on all of them there and bring them up!"

Her tear-filled eyes suddenly sparkled gaily and mischievously. She liked the idea of this perilous trip. As a girl she had been known

for her daring. Just before the war, when she was already a married woman with two children, she used to go to the pub with her husband on paydays, where she would play the accordion and dance, tapping with her heavy iron-shod boots, as she whirled about with the young loaders, her workmates on the coal-washer. And today, too, in this terrible and difficult moment, she waved her hand with a reckless cheery gesture as she called out:

"While there's life there's hope. What is to be will be, eh, Grandad?"

Marya Ignatyevna heaved a fat heavy leg over the edge of the tub, gasping and groaning.

"Varka, lend me a hand," she said. "I don't want that German to touch me, I'll manage without him," and she flopped over into the tub.

To her eldest daughter, who was carrying an eighteen-month-old boy, she said:

"Lidka, don't forget to feed the goat, the leaves are chopped up already. There's no bread, but you take the half pumpkin left from yesterday and boil it in the iron pot, it's under the bed. Borrow some salt from Dmitrievna. And remember, see that the goat doesn't stray or it'll be snapped up in a minute."

The tub swung free and Marya Ignatyevna, losing her balance, grabbed for the side, while Varka Zotova flung an arm round her ample waist.

"What have you got there under your blouse?" she asked in surprise.

Marya made no reply, but snapped angrily at the German corporal:

"Well, what are you waiting for? We're all in, why don't you let us down?"

As though he had understood her words, the corporal gave the signal and the tub descended. Two or three times it bumped against the dark, moss-covered boards of the pit-shaft so violently that all of them were thrown off their feet; then it continued downwards smoothly and they were engulfed in a dank darkness, broken only by the dim light of the lamp, which barely picked out the rotting boards with the thin trickles of water silently running down their sides. Chill, dank air rose from the mine, and the deeper the tub descended, the colder and more terrifying it was.

The women were silent. They had suddenly been cut off from all that had been near and dear to them; the sound of weeping and wailing was still in their ears, yet the sombre silence of the underground was swallowing them, subduing mind and heart. Their thoughts turned to the men who had been sitting in the gloom for three days already.... What were they thinking? What were they feeling? What were they waiting for, what hopes had they? Who were they, young or old? Whom were they dreaming of, whom were they sorry for? Whence came their strength to live?

The old man turned the light of his lamp on a flat white stone wedged in between two beams.

"It's thirty-six metres from this stone to the shaft bottom," he said. "This is the first gallery. One of you women had better call out or the lads may start shooting."

The women obeyed.

"Don't be afraid, boys, it's us!" shouted Zotova.

"It's your own folks, Russians, your own people!" called Nyushka, at the top of her voice.

And Marya Ignatyevna trumpeted down:

"Listen, bo-o-oys, don't sho-o-ot! Bo-o-oys, don't sho-o-ot!"

II

AT THE SHAFT bottom they were met by two sentries with tommy guns. Each of them had hand grenades slung from his belt. They stared at the old man and the women, screwing up their eyes painfully at the feeble light of the lamp, shading them with their hands, and finally turning away. This tiny yellow flame no bigger than a baby's little finger, surrounded by a thick metal gauze, dazzled them like bright summer sunlight.

One of them offered his shoulder to help Ignatyevna out, but he had overrated his strength for when she leaned her weight on him, he lost his balance and fell. The other sentry laughed and said:

"Fine one you are, Vanya!"

It was impossible to make out whether they were old or young; thick beards covered their faces, they spoke slowly and moved cautiously like blind men.

"You haven't got a bite of anything with you by any chance, have you?" asked the one who had tried to help Marya Ignatyevna.

The other immediately broke in:

"And even if they have, they'll give it to Comrade Kostitsyn; he'll share it out."

The women kept their eyes fixed on the Red Army men, while the old man, raising his lamp, lighted up the high vault at the shaft bottom.

"Not bad," he growled. "Holding out all right. Those timberers certainly did a good job."

One of the sentries remained at the pit-shaft while the other led the women and the old miner to the commander.

"Where have you settled down here?" asked the old man.

"Right here, through the gate, to the right, and down the corridor, that's where we are."

"That's not a gate," exclaimed Kozlov. "That's the ventilation shutter. On the first slope. . . ."

The sentry walked beside the old man, with the women following.

A few steps from the shutter stood two machine guns pointing towards the shaft bottom. A few yards further on the old man raised his lamp.

"Are they asleep, or what?" he asked.

"No, they're dead," the sentry replied slowly.

The old man turned the light on the bodies in their Red Army greatcoats and tunics. Heads, chests, shoulders and arms were wrapped in bandages and rags, rusty with dried blood. They lay there side by side, pressed close to one another as though for warmth. Some of them wore boots, two were in felt boots two in jackboots and one barefoot. Their eyes were sunken, their faces covered with stubble.

"Good Lord!" whispered the women looking at the dead, and crossing themselves.

"Come on along. No use standing around here!" said the sentry.

But the women and the old man seemed rooted to the spot. They stared at the bodies, sensing with horror the stench emanating from them. At last they moved on. A faint groan sounded from beyond a turn in the gallery.

"Are we there?" asked the old man.

"No, this is our hospital," replied the sentry.

Three wounded men were lying on boards. A Red Army man was standing beside one of them, holding a billycan of water to his lips; the other two were absolutely motionless. The old man turned his lamp on them.

The Red Army man with the billycan turned round.

"Who're these people and where are they from?" he asked; then, catching the women's horrified eyes fixed on the two men lying there so utterly still, he added soothingly: "Their troubles will be over in an hour or two."

The wounded man who was drinking said in a weak voice:

"Oh, for some nice cabbage soup, mother!"

"We're a deputation," said Varvara Zotova, with a bitter laugh.

"What sort of a deputation? From the Germans, are you?" asked the orderly.

"Never mind about that now," the sentry interrupted. "You can tell it to the commander."

"Show us a light, Grandad," the wounded man begged. With a groan that seemed to come from way down inside he raised himself and threw off his greatcoat, exposing a leg that was shattered above the knee.

Nyusha Kramarenko gasped.

In the same quiet voice the wounded man asked Kozlov:

"Turn the light this way, please."

He raised himself higher to get a better look. Calmly and intently he examined his leg as though it had nothing to do with him, as though it were something apart from himself, unable to realize that this dead, rotting flesh, this black, gangrenous skin could be a part of his own familiar, living body.

"Now, there you see for yourself," he said reproachfully. "There are maggots in it, you can see 'em crawling. I told the commander it was no good worrying about me, better to have left me up there. I could have thrown a few grenades and then put a bullet through my head."

Once again he stared at the wound, muttering:

"Look at them crawling, just look at the bastards."

"You weren't the only one they dragged down," the sentry said irately. "Counting these two," he said pointing to the men lying on the ground, "there were fourteen bodies."

"But why should you suffer down here?" asked Nyushka Krama-

renko. "If you came up at least they'd clean and bandage your wounds in a hospital."

"Who? The Germans?" retorted the wounded man. "I'd rather let the worms eat me up alive here."

"Come on, now, come on!" the sentry urged. "None of that talk around here, citizens."

"Just a minute," said Marya Ignatyevna, pulling out a piece of bread from under her blouse. She held it out to the wounded man. The sentry raised his tommy gun.

"That's forbidden," he said sternly and authoritatively. "Every crumb of bread in the pit goes to the commander to be distributed. Come along, come along! You're doing no good here."

And they went on.

The detachment had taken up its position in some abandoned workings in the first western gallery of the eastern slope of the mine. Machine guns stood in the gallery and there were even two light mortars there.

When the deputation turned into the gallery they suddenly heard a sound so unexpected that they involuntarily stopped short. It was the sound of singing coming down the gallery—some song they did not know, a mournful air sung in a muffled, weary voice.

"That's to keep our spirits up, instead of dinner," their guide told them seriously. "This is the second day the commander's been teaching it to us. He says that's the song his father used to sing when he was in prison in tsarist times."

A single voice rose again in long-drawn-out notes:

"No foe could mock your passing,
For we were all your own.
We came to close your eagle eyes,
You did not die alone."

"Listen, you women," said Nyushka Kramarenko firmly, "let me go first, I'll cry and wail, I'm better at it than you. The way it looks now the Germans will shoot our children up there and those men won't even budge."

The old man turned on them in a fury.

"You bitches!" he rasped, his voice thick with rage. "Come to wheedle them, have you? You ought to be shot yourselves."

Marya Ignatyevna pushed past Nyusha.

"Get out of my way!" she said. "It's time I had my say."

The sentry standing in the drift raised his rifle.

"Halt, hands up!"

"It's only women coming!" shouted Marya Ignatyevna, and striding ahead she demanded authoritatively: "Where's the commander? Lead me to him."

From the darkness a calm voice sounded:

"What's the matter there?"

The lamp lit up a group of Red Army men lying on the ground around a tall broad-shouldered man with a fair round beard, heavily sprinkled with coal dust. The hands and faces of the men around him were just as black as his, their teeth and eyeballs dazzlingly white by contrast.

Old Kozlov looked at them with a thrill of emotion: these were the soldiers whose fame had rung throughout the length and breadth of the Donetz Basin. Somehow he had expected to see them in Kuban jackets, red breeches, silver-mounted sabres, with a lock of hair showing jauntily from under tall Cossack hats or caps with shining lacquered peaks. Instead he was looking at the faces of workers, blackened with coal dust, faces just like those of his pals, hewers, timberers, blasters and pony drivers. And looking at them, the old miner realized in his heart of hearts that the bitter fate they had chosen in preference to being taken prisoner was also his own.

He threw an irate glance at Marya Ignatyevna when she began to speak:

"Comrade Commander," she said, "we've come to you as a kind of deputation."

The commander rose, tall, broad-shouldered and very thin, and the Red Army men immediately rose to their feet. They were wearing quilted jackets and dirty caps with earflaps and their faces were overgrown with a thick stubble. The women stared at them. These were their brothers, the brothers of their husbands; they used to come home looking like that after the day and night shifts, grimy with coal dust, calm, weary, blinking painfully at the light.

"And what have you deputies come for?" asked the commander with a smile.

"It's very simple," replied Marya Ignatyevna. "The Germans rounded up all the women and children and told us to send some women down to persuade the men in the mine to surrender, and that

if we didn't get them to come up they'd shoot all of us and the children too."

"So that's it," said the commander, shaking his head. "And what do you want to tell us?"

Marya Ignatyevna looked the commander straight in the eye. Then she turned to the other two women and asked softly and sadly:

"What'll we say, girls?" From under her blouse she pulled out some pieces of bread, boiled beets, potatoes boiled in their jackets, and some dry crusts.

The Red Army men turned aside, their eyes lowered, ashamed to stare at the food, so beautiful and impossible was the sight of it, so tempting. They were afraid to look at it, for it was life. The commander alone looked at the cold potatoes and bread without flinching.

"This isn't only my answer," said Marya Ignatyevna. "Our women gave me the things to bring you. I'd have brought more, only I was scared the Germans would search me."

She placed the poor gift on a kerchief, bowed low, and brought it over to the commander, saying:

"Excuse us. . . ."

He bowed to her in silence.

"Ignatyevna," said Nyusha Kramarenko softly, "when I saw that wounded man with the maggots eating him up alive, when I heard what he said, I forgot everything!"

Varvara Zotova turned smiling eyes on the Red Army men.

"It looks as though the deputation came for nothing, comrades!" she said.

The men looked at her young face.

"Stay here with us," said one of them, "and marry me."

"That's an idea," said Varvara. "But can you support a wife?"

Everyone laughed.

Over two hours had passed since the women had come down. The commander and the old miner were sitting apart talking quietly.

Varvara Zotova was sitting on the ground. One of the men was leaning on his elbow beside her. In the semi-darkness she could see the pallor of his brow through the grime of the coal dust, the bony structure of his face and the veins at his temples showing through the skin. With his mouth half-open like a child's, he gazed intently at her face and the whiteness of her neck. Tenderness welled up in her

heart. She stroked his hand softly and moved closer to him. His face lit up with a smile and he whispered hoarsely:

"Ekh, why did you come down here to upset us? Women, bread—everything to remind us of the sunshine."

With a swift, sudden movement she threw her arms around him, kissed him, and burst into tears.

The others watched them mutely, seriously, without a thought of laughter or jokes. Not a word broke the silence.

"Well, time for us to go," said Ignatyevna, getting up. "Let's go, Kozlov, shall we?"

"I'll see you as far as the shaft," said the old miner. "But I'm not going up with you. There's nothing for me to do up there."

"What's that?" said Nyusha. "Why, you'll starve to death down here."

"And what if I do?" he replied. "I'll die here with my own people, in the pit where I've worked all my life."

He said this in such a calm determined tone that they realized it was no use arguing with him.

The commander stepped over to the women.

"Well, friends," he said, "don't think harshly of us. It's my opinion that the Germans only wanted to scare you and use you as provocateurs. Tell your children about us. Let them tell their children that our people know how to die."

"What do you say if we send a letter with them?" said one of the men. "Our last greetings to send our families after the war."

"No letters," replied the commander. "The Germans will probably search them when they come out."

The women left them, weeping as though it were their own husbands or brothers they were leaving there to die.

III

TWICE that night the Germans threw smoke bombs down the shaft. Kostitsyn gave orders to close all the ventilation shafts and pile up shale against them. The sentries got to the shaft through the air vents and stood guard in gas masks.

The orderly made his way to Kostitsyn through the darkness to report that the wounded men had died.

"It wasn't the smoke bombs, they died their own death," he said, and feeling for Kostitsyn's hand, he pressed a bit of bread into it.

"Minayev wouldn't eat it. 'Give it back to the commander,' he said. 'It won't do me any good now anyhow.'"

Silently the commander put the bread in his haversack, the detachment's food store.

Hour after hour passed. The lamp flickered and went out. The darkness was complete. For a few seconds Kostitsyn turned on his flashlight; the battery had almost run down, the dark red filaments of the bulb scarcely glowed, too weak to overcome the immensity of the darkness.

Kostitsyn divided the food which Ignatyevna had brought into ten portions. There was one potato and a small piece of bread for each.

"Well, Grandad," he said to the old miner. "Are you sorry you decided to stay with us?"

"No," the old man replied. "Why should I be sorry? Here my heart is at peace and my conscience clear."

"Talk to us, Grandad, tell us something interesting," asked a voice out of the darkness.

"That's right, Grandad," another voice chimed in. "Don't be shy, we're all working folk here, all ten of us."

"What kind of work did you do?" asked the old man.

"All kinds, Captain Kostitsyn here used to be a teacher before the war."

"I taught botany in a teachers' training college," said the Captain, and burst out laughing.

"There you are. And four of us were fitters, me and three of my buddies."

"And all four of us are named Ivan. The four Ivans."

"Sergeant Ladyin was a compositor, worked in a printshop, and Gavrilov, our medical orderly... he's here, isn't he?"

"I'm here," replied another voice. "My doctoring is over."

"Gavrilov used to be in charge of a tool room."

"And then there's Mukhin, he was a barber, and Kuzin worked in a chemical factory."

"And that's the lot."

"Who said that? The orderly?" asked the old man.

"That's right. You see, you're getting to know us already."

"So there's not one miner here among you, no one who worked underground?"

"We're all underground men now," said a voice from a distant corner. "All miners."

"Who was that?" asked the old man. "The fitter, wasn't it?"

"Himself in person."

A quiet, rather lazy laugh went up.

"And so now we have to rest."

"We're still in action," said Kostitsyn. "We're in a besieged fortress. We're holding up enemy forces. And remember, comrades, that as long as one of us remains alive, he is a soldier in our army, he is fighting a great battle."

These words rang out loudly in the darkness, and no one saw how Kostitsyn wiped away the sweat that covered his face as a result of the effort it cost him to pronounce those fine-sounding words.

"Yes, he's a teacher," thought the miner, "a real teacher," and aloud he said approvingly:

"Yes, boys, your Captain could manage our whole mine; he'd be a real manager."

But not one of the men realized what high praise this was, for nobody knew that all his life Kozlov had grumbled at the managers, saying that the man hadn't been born who could manage such a famous pit, whose shaft Kozlov had sunk with his own hands.

Again the old man's voice sounded through the darkness and it was full of trust and love for the people whose terrible fate he was voluntarily sharing.

"Lads," he said, "I know this pit like a man knows his own wife, like a mother knows her son. I worked here practically all my life, ever since that first gallery was driven forty years ago. There were only three breaks—once in 1905, when they kept me in jail fourteen months for taking part in the uprising against the tsar; then in 1911 when I was in prison another six months for agitating against the tsar, and then again in 1916, when I was sent to the front and was taken prisoner by the Germans."

"There you are!" called out a laughing voice. "You old people do like to talk big, don't you? When we were on the Don there was an old Cossack who was always bragging, showing us the crosses he got from the tsar, always jeering at us. We don't let ourselves get captured alive!"

"Did you see me in their prison camp?!" shouted Kozlov. "Did you see me there?! I was captured when I was wounded, when I was unconscious."

"Sergeant, Sergeant!" said Kostitsyn sternly.

"Excuse me, Comrade Captain," came the reply. "No offence meant, I was just kidding."

"That's all right, it doesn't matter," said the old man with a gesture in the darkness, to show that no offence was taken. "I escaped three times," he said in a mollified tone. "The first time it was from Westphalia. I was working in a mine there too, the same kind of work, the same kind of pit, but I just couldn't stand it. I felt I'd rather choke than go on working there."

"How'd they feed you?" asked several voices simultaneously.

"If you can call it feeding! Two hundred and fifty grams of bread and soup so thin you could see Berlin at the bottom of the plate. Not a drop of fat in it. Just hot water."

"I could do with some of that hot water right now!"

Again the commander's voice rang out:

"Merkulov, remember my orders: no talking about food."

"But I was only talking about hot water. That's not food, Comrade Captain," protested Merkulov in an amiable, weary voice.

"Yes," continued Kozlov, "I worked there about a month and then escaped and made for Holland. I crossed the border, lived sixteen days in Holland, and then took a boat for Norway. Only I never got there. The Germans caught us at sea and took us to Hamburg. They gave me what for there—tied me to a cross. I hung there for two hours, while the doctor's assistant kept feeling my pulse and dashing water over me. Then they sent me to Alsace, to the iron mines. underground work there too. Our revolution came while I was there, so I escaped again, made my way across the whole of Germany. This time their workers helped me. I'd learned to talk their lingo by then. I never spent the night in a village, tried to keep to the workers' settlements. I kept going like that. And when there were only twenty versts left to go, they caught me again and clapped me into jail. I ran away from there for the third time. Made my way to the Baltic provinces, and came down with typhus. There I lay and thought: 'Will I really never get back to the mines after all; am I going to die here?' But I'd been one too many for the Germans, and I was one too many for the typhus too. I got well again. Till '21 I served in the army in

the Civil War, volunteered. You see, I hated the old way of things. When I was still a young fellow I used to distribute 'notices,' as we used to call our leaflets."

"Yes, there's no getting you down, old man," said the soldier sitting next to Kozlov.

"Oh, I'm a rare 'un, I am," said the old man, with child-like boastfulness. "I'm a working man, a revolutionary; I've never begrudged anything for the sake of truth. Well, I came back when they demobilized me, in April. It was evening. I came...." He was silent for a moment, reliving the past in his mind. "I came back, yes, came back again. And I'll tell you the truth, I didn't go to the village, but came straight here. I wanted to take a look at the pit-head. I just stood there and couldn't help crying. I wasn't drunk, but the tears rolled down my face. It's the truth, by God! I looked at the pit and at the slag heap, and just bawled. But some of the folks around recognized me and ran to tell my old woman. 'Your old man's come to life again!' they said. 'He's gone to the pit-head! He's standing there and crying!' And believe me or not, to the last day of her life my old woman could never forgive me for going to the mine first before I went home to her. 'You're a miner,' she'd say; 'you've got a lump of coal where your heart should be.' "

He was silent a moment, then continued:

"But believe me, comrade soldier, I can tell you're a working lad too, and I tell you straight: I've always dreamed of working all my life in this mine, and then dying here."

He addressed his invisible listeners as though they were one man. And he felt that this man was somebody he knew well, that after the hideous times he had lived through fate had brought him an old friend, a worker, who was now sitting beside him in the old abandoned workings, listening to him with understanding and affection.

"Well, comrades," said the commander, "come and get your rations."

"What about a light," said someone jokingly, "to make sure nobody comes twice?"

"Well, come on, come on; why isn't anyone coming?" said Kostitsyn.

Voices sounded from the darkness:

"Go on, you go.... Give our miner his ration first, give it to

Grandad. . . . Go on, Grandad, what's the matter with you? Reach out for your ration."

The old man was deeply moved by the unselfishness of these hungry men. He had seen much in his life, had seen more than once how starving people pounce on a bit of bread.

After the food had been distributed, the old man stayed beside Kostitsyn.

"There you are, Comrade Kozlov," said the commander. "Twenty-seven of us came down here into the pit. There are nine left. The men are very weak and there's no more bread. I was afraid they'd start bickering and quarrelling when they realized what our position was. And actually there was a time when there was wrangling over every trifle. But then there was a turning point, and I give myself a good deal of credit for it: we had a very serious talk before you came. And now the harder things are, the closer we are to each other; the darker it is, the better friends we all are. My father was in prison under the tsar when he was still a student, and I often remember the stories he told me when I was a child. 'There was very little hope,' he said, 'but I had faith.' And he taught me: 'There's no such thing as a hopeless situation; fight to the end, as long as there's breath in your body.' And after all, your hair stands on end when you think how we fought last month, what forces the enemy sent against us—and yet we didn't surrender to those forces, we kept them off. There are nine of us left. We've gone down deep into the earth. Maybe there's a German division standing up there, over our heads. But we're not licked. We'll go on fighting, and we'll get out of here. They'll not be able to rob us of the sky, and the wind, and the grass—we'll get out of here!"

And in the same quiet voice the old man answered:

"Why leave the mine altogether? It's home here. Sometimes you get sick and don't go to the hospital—you lie here in the mine and it cures you."

"We'll get out, we'll get out all right," said Kostitsyn loudly, so that everyone could hear him. "We'll get out of this pit; we're not the kind to take a licking, and we've proved it, comrades!"

He had hardly finished speaking when a heavy, slow, dull shock made the roof and ground tremble. The props creaked and cracked, and fragments of slag rattled to the ground. It seemed as though everything around surged and heaved, and then suddenly clamped together,

pressing down on the men who had been thrown to the ground, crushing them, driving the breath from their lungs. There was a moment when it seemed impossible to breathe, the thick fine dust which had settled on the props and walls over the course of so many years had been shaken off and now filled the air.

Coughing, choking, somebody said hoarsely:

"The Germans have blown up the shaft! This is the end...."

And immediately Kostitsyn's stubborn, frenzied voice broke in:

"No, they won't stamp us into the earth! We'll get out, d'you hear? We'll get up and out!"

A sort of holy, grim determination gripped the men. Coughing and choking as if they were drunk with the idea that possessed them, they shouted:

"We'll get out, Comrade Captain, we'll get to the top! We want to get out and we will!"

IV

KOSTITSYN sent two men to examine the shaft. The old miner led the way. It was hard going as in many places the explosion had caused falls or even brought down the roof.

"Follow me, hang on to me," said Kozlov, as he made his way easily and confidently over the piles of shale and the fallen props.

He found the sentries at the shaft bottom—both of them lying in pools of still warm, but already cooling blood, each with his shattered tommy gun clutched close. They buried the two men, covering them with piles of shale.

"And now there are three Ivans left," said one of the men.

For a long time the old man felt his way about the shaft bottom, went to the shaft and bustled around noisily, examined the props and roof and exclaimed at the force of the explosion.

"There's villains for you!" he growled. "To blow up the shaft! Whoever heard of such a thing! It's like hitting a baby over the head with a club."

He crawled away somewhere far off, until nothing more could be heard of him. The men called out to him twice:

"Grandad, hey, Grandad! Come back, mate, the Captain's waiting!"

But there was neither sight nor sound of the old man.

"Hope he's all right," said one of the men, and called again: "Hey, there, Grandad! Miner, where are you? Can you hear me?"

"Hey, where are you?" came Kostitsyn's voice from the main gallery.

He crept along till he found the men and they told him of the sentries' death.

"Ivan Korenkov, who wanted to send a letter with the women," said Kostitsyn, and they were all silent. Then Kostitsyn asked:

"And where's our old man?"

"He went off a long time ago. We'll shout out for him," said one of the men, "or maybe we'd better fire a burst from a tommy gun. He'd hear that all right."

"No," said Kostitsyn, "let's wait."

They sat there silently, all of them peering in the direction of the shaft, in the vain hope of discerning a ray of light. But the darkness was thick and impenetrable.

"The Germans have buried us, Comrade Commander," said one of the men.

"Come, now," answered Kostitsyn, "don't you know there's no burying us? Look at how many of them we've buried, and we'll bury as many more yet."

"Wouldn't mind doing it, I must say," said the other man.

"I should say," said the first slowly.

But Kostitsyn could hear by their voices that they did not share his faith.

"They've planted a good ton of explosives, torn the guts out of the place," he admitted.

The rattle of falling shale was heard in the distance, then again silence.

"Rats," remarked one of the men. "What tough luck we've had! Ever since I was a kid I worked hard. At the front I had a heavy rifle to drag—an anti-tank rifle, and now it's a hard death I've found."

"And I was a botanist," said Kostitsyn, and laughed. It always made him laugh to remember that he had once been a botanist. His former life now seemed to him so radiant, so beautiful, that he had completely forgotten the interminable differences he had had with the head of the chair, had forgotten that his master's dissertation had been a failure and that he had been obliged to swallow his pride and do it over again. Here, in the depths of the ruined mine, he

remembered the past as a laboratory with big, wide-open windows or a woodland glade, with the morning sun shining on the dewy meadow, where he had supervised the collection of specimens for the Institute herbarium.

"No, that wasn't a rat. It's Grandad fussing about," said the other man.

"'Where are you all?" Kozlov's voice sounded from the distance,

They could tell by his heavy, excited breathing which carried to them from the distance that something extraordinary had happened, something that caused their hearts to beat in joyful anticipation.

"Where are you? Are you there?" asked Kozlov impatiently. "Good thing I stayed down here with you, lads. Hurry up and let's get back to the commander. I've found a way out."

"I'm here," said Kostitsyn.

"Here's how it is, Comrade Commander. As soon as I got to the shaft I felt a draught; I followed it up and this is what I found. The fall jammed up above and choked the shaft, leaving it clear as far as the first gallery. There's a crevice in the gallery caused by the explosion, and that's where the draught's coming from. There's a cross-cut there for about five hundred yards; it leads out into an adit. I used to use it in 1910. I tried to climb up the emergency ladder, and got up about twenty metres, but the rungs had been knocked out further up. So I decided to use up my last matches to investigate, and found things as I've told you. We'll have to put in about ten rungs and clear away some of the rocks blocking the shaft, hack away about two metres, and we'll come out in the old gallery."

No one said a word.

At last Kostitsyn broke the silence.

"Well, what did I tell you?" he said calmly and slowly although his heart was pounding. "I said that it wouldn't be here we'd be buried."

One of the men suddenly burst into tears.

"Is it really true, shall we really see daylight again?" he said.

"How could you have known all this, Comrade Captain?" whispered the other. "You know, I thought you were just talking to keep our spirits up when you said there was hope for us."

"I told the commander about the first gallery when the women were still down here," said the old man confidently. "It was I who gave him that hope. Only he told me to keep mum until it was certain."

"Nobody wants to die, after all," said the man who had broken down, ashamed of his tears now.

Kostitsyn got up.

"I must examine it myself," he said. "Then we'll call the others here. Come and show me. Wait here, comrades, and if any of the others come, not a word until I return. You understand?"

Once again the men were left alone.

"Shall we really see daylight again?" said one of them. "It actually gives you the creeps to think of it."

"It's all very well to be a hero, but nobody wants to die," growled the other, still unable to forgive himself for betraying his emotion.

V

NOWHERE in the world, perhaps, has a job been done at the cost of such superhuman effort than that which Kostitsyn and his detachment performed. The merciless darkness numbed their brains and preyed on their hearts, while hunger racked them both when they were working and during their brief periods of rest. Only now, when they saw a way out of their seemingly hopeless plight did they feel the full weight of the horror that was threatening to crush them; only now did they drink to the dregs the bitterness of their position. The simplest task that would mean an hour's work in the light of day for a strong, healthy man meant days of exhausting labour for them. There were moments when they literally dropped to the ground, feeling that no power on earth could raise them again. But after a while they got up and, leaning against the wall, set to work again. Some of the men worked in silence, slowly, methodically, lest they waste an extra ounce of strength, others worked with feverish energy for a few minutes, fuming and raging, then collapsed, gasping for breath, and sat there, hands hanging limply, waiting for their strength to return. In the same way thirsty men wait patiently and doggedly for a few drops of murky, tepid moisture to ooze up out of a dried-up spring. Those who had rejoiced the most in the beginning, and who thought they would be out of the pit in next to no time, were the first to lose heart. Those who had not expected immediate release were calmer and worked more evenly. Sometimes desperate, furious cries would ring out through the darkness.

"Give us a light... no strength to go on without light!... How

can a man work without grub?... If only I could sleep, just sleep! ... Better to die than work like this! ..."

The men chewed their leather straps, licked the grease off their rifles, tried to catch rats. But in the darkness the swift, elusive vermin slipped out of their very hands. And with bursting heads and ringing ears, reeling with weakness, they returned to their work.

Kostitsyn was like a man of iron. He seemed to be everywhere at once, with the three fitters who were cutting and bending new rungs out of thick iron bars, with the men clearing away the rubble, with those hammering the new rungs into the wall of the shaft. One would have thought he could see the expression on the men's faces despite the darkness, for he was always on the spot when needed, beside the man who felt his strength ebbing away. Sometimes he would help to raise a man who had fallen, and speak a few words of encouragement, sometimes he would say slowly, quietly: "I order you to get up, only the dead have the right to lie down here." He was merciless, pitiless, but he knew that if he permitted himself the slightest weakness or pity for those who collapsed, they would all perish.

Once one of the men, Kuzin by name, fell to the ground and said:

"Do what you like with me, Comrade Captain, I haven't the strength to get up."

"I'll make you get up," said Kostitsyn.

"And how will you do it?" said Kuzin in anguished mockery, breathing heavily. "Shoot me? There's nothing I'd like better. I can't stand this torture any longer."

"No, I won't shoot you," said Kostitsyn. "Lie there if you want to. We'll carry you up to the surface. But when we get up there into the sunlight, I won't give you my hand. I'll spit, and send you packing."

And with a curse Kuzin dragged himself to his feet and staggered off to help clear away the rocks.

Only once did Kostitsyn lose his self-control. One of the men came up to him and said in a low voice:

"Sergeant Ladyin's down: I don't know if he's dead or if he's just collapsed; but he doesn't answer when I speak to him."

Kostitsyn knew the Sergeant well, a simple upright man. He knew that if he, the commander, were to be killed or wounded, Ladyin would take his place and lead the men just as he would have done. And when he silently approached the Sergeant in the darkness it was with the

knowledge that the latter had worked without a murmur, and had given out sooner than the others simply because he was weak from a recent wound and considerable loss of blood.

"Ladyin!" he called. "Sergeant Ladyin!" and passed his hand over the cold, damp face of the man lying on the ground.

The Sergeant made no reply.

Kostitsyn bent over him and dashed the water from his flask over the man's head and chest.

Ladyin stirred.

"Who's that?" he muttered.

"It's me, the Captain," replied the commander, bending lower over him.

Ladyin put his arm around Kostitsyn's neck. He pulled himself up till his wet face touched the Captain's cheek, and said in a whisper:

"Comrade Kostitsyn! I can't get up. Shoot me and let the men feed on my body. It'll mean their salvation," and he kissed the commander with his cold lips.

"Silence!" shouted Kostitsyn. "Silence!"

"Comrade Captain, they won't be able to hold out."

"Silence!" shouted Kostitsyn again. "I order you to be silent!"

The terrible simplicity of the Sergeant's words, coming to him through the darkness, shook him with horror. He left Ladyin and quickly walked off in the direction from which the sound of work could be heard.

And Ladyin crawled after him, dragging a heavy iron bar behind him, stopping every few metres to summon his strength, and then crawling on again.

"Here's another rung," he said. "Give it to the men working up above."

Whenever anything went wrong with the work, the men would ask:

"Where's the boss? Grandad, come here! Grandad, where've you got to? Hey, Grandad!"

All of them, including Kostitsyn himself, knew well enough that had it not been for the old man, they would never have been able to cope with the tremendous task they had undertaken, and which they finally carried through. He moved with a sure, light step in the darkness of the mine, groped around and found the material they needed. He it was who found a hammer and chisel, who brought

three rusty picks from a far-off working, who advised the men who were driving new rungs into the wall of the shaft in place of the missing ones to make themselves fast with straps and ropes. He was the first to make his way to the upper gallery and there groped around until he found the stones blocking the entrance to the cross-cut. He moved lightly and swiftly, climbed up and down the shaft as if he felt neither hunger nor fatigue.

The work was nearing completion. Even the weakest suddenly felt a new influx of strength. Even Kuzin and Ladyin felt stronger, getting to their feet and standing firmly when a voice shouted down from above:

"The last rung's in!"

The men were drunk with joy. For the last time Kostitsyn led them back to the old workings. There he distributed tommy guns and ordered each man to fasten hand grenades to his belt.

"Comrades," he said, "the time has come to return to the surface. Remember, the war is going on up there." He paused a moment. "Comrades," he continued, "twenty-seven of us came down here, eight are returning. May the names of those who rest here eternally be remembered forever!"

He led the detachment to the shaft.

It was only their nervous elation that gave the men the strength to clamber up the shaky rungs, to draw themselves up metre by metre through the wet, slippery shaft. It took more than two hours for six of them to make their way up to the gallery, but finally they were there, sitting in the low cross-cut, waiting for Kostitsyn and Kozlov, the last two.

No one saw in the darkness how it happened.... It seemed to be a cruel, senseless accident that caused the old miner suddenly to lose his grip within a few metres of the cross-cut and sent him hurtling downwards.

"Grandad, Grandad!" several anguished voices cried out simultaneously. But the only reply was a dull thud from below as the old man's body struck the pile of rubble at the shaft bottom.

And only the old man himself had felt some minutes before his death that something strange and terrible was happening to him. "Can it be death?" he thought.

At the very moment when the men had yelled down joyfully that the last rung was in, when the weakest of them felt he could

move again, the old man had felt his life's strength ebbing away from him. Never before had he experienced anything like it. His head was spinning, crimson spots flashed and circled before his eyes. Slowly he pulled himself up the shaft leading from the pit where he had worked all his life, and with every movement, with each effort, his grasp weakened, his heart grew colder. Far-off, long-forgotten scenes flashed through his memory—his black-bearded father stepping softly in his bast shoes, leading him to the pit-head . . . the English mine inspector shaking his head and smiling as he looked at the small, eleven-year-old boy who had come to work in the mine. And again a wave of crimson seemed to roll before his eyes. What was it—sunset in the Donetz Basin, the red sun shining through the smoke and dust; or was it blood, or that bold flaming piece of red cloth which he had pulled out from under his jacket and carried at the head of the huge crowd of ragged miners, his heavy boots clattering as he made straight for the Cossacks and mounted police dashing out from behind the office building? . . . He exerted every effort to call out, to shout for help. But there was no more strength in him; his lips moved soundlessly.

He pressed up against the cold slippery stone, his fingers clutching the rung. The soft damp mould touched his cheek, water trickled over his forehead, and it seemed to him that his mother's tears were trickling down his face.

Again he tried to shout, to call Kostitsyn, and then his fingers lost their grip and he fell.

VI

IT WAS NIGHT when they came out into the open. A fine warm rain was falling. Silently the men took off their caps and sat down on the ground. The warm raindrops fell on their bare heads. Not a word was said. The nocturnal darkness seemed bright to eyes accustomed to the heavy blackness of the pit. They drew in deep breaths, looked up at the dark clouds, ran their fingers through the wet blades of spring grass which had pushed their way through last year's dead stubble. They gazed into the misty night, listened to the rain pattering on the ground. Sometimes a gust of wind came from the east, and they would turn their faces towards it. They gazed and gazed around them, at the wide-open spaces before them, and

even in the darkness each man of them saw his heart's desire—the sun.

"Don't let your rifles get wet," said Kostitsyn.

The scout who had been sent out returned. Loudly, boldly he shouted to them:

"There are no Germans in the settlement!" he called. "They left three days ago. Come on, hurry up. Two old women are boiling potatoes for us and they've spread out some straw. We'll be able to lie down and have a good sleep. Today is the twenty-sixth. We've been in the pit twelve days. They say that the whole village was saying Masses for us in secret.... They thought we were dead."

It was very warm in the house. The two women and an old man brought them hot water and potatoes.

It was not long before the men were asleep, huddled together on the warm damp straw. Kostitsyn sat on a stool with his tommy gun, on guard. He sat there, upright, head held high, and stared into the darkness that precedes the dawn. He decided to spend a day, a night and another day there and the following night they could leave. A queer scratching sound caught his ear—something like a mouse gnawing under the floor. He listened intently. No, that was no mouse. The sound seemed at once far off and near, as though someone were timidly, gently and yet stubbornly tapping away with a tiny hammer. Maybe it was the noise of that work underground still in his ears? Sleep was far from him. He sat there and thought of Kozlov. "My heart has turned to lead," he reflected. "It will never be capable of love or compassion any more."

An old woman came down the corridor noiselessly on her bare feet. Dawn was breaking. The rim of the sun appeared through the clouds, lighting up a corner of the white stove; drops of water glistened on the windowpanes. A hen cackled excitedly. The old woman murmured something to it as she bent over the wicker basket. Again that strange sound.

"What's that?" asked Kostitsyn. "Can you hear, Grandma? As if a hammer were tapping somewhere; or is it only my imagination?"

The old woman's reply came quietly from the corridor:

"It's here, in the corridor. The chicks are hatching; they're breaking through the shells with their beaks."

Kostitsyn looked at the men lying there. They were sleeping soundly, without stirring, breathing slowly and evenly. The sun was

shining in on a fragment of broken mirror lying on the table, and the reflection played in a narrow bright strip on Kuzin's hollow temple. A wave of love for these men who had borne so much surged through Kostitsyn. It seemed to him that never in his life had he experienced such affection and warmth of feeling.

He gazed at the black, bearded faces, gazed at the heavy bruised hands of the Red Army men. Tears coursed down his cheeks, but he did not wipe them away.

The dead Donetz steppe stretches away, majestic and sad. The ruined pit buildings rise out of the mist; the high slag-heaps loom darkly, and a bluish smoke from the burning pyrites steals along their dark slopes and then, caught by the wind, is whipped away, leaving only an acrid smell of sulphur behind. The steppe wind runs to and fro between the miners' wrecked cottages and whistles through the gutted office buildings. Doors and shutters hanging on a single hinge creak as they swing back and forth; the rails of the narrow-gauge railway are coated with a rusty red. Locomotives stand lifeless under the remains of a blown-up bridge. The powerful elevator mechanism has been blasted away by the force of the explosion, and the five-hundred metre steel cable has slipped from its drum and lies in coils on the ground. The tapering concrete mouths of the inlet ventilators have been laid bare. The red copper of the torn windings gleams among the wreckage of the mighty dynamos, and the heavy coal-cutting machines lie and rust on the stone floor of the workshops.

It is terrible here at night, in the moonlight. There is no silence in this kingdom of death. The wind whistles through moaning wires; loose sheets of metal roofing clang like bells; a piece of sheet iron that has crumpled up in the fire of the burning building suddenly cracks as it straightens out; a brick comes crashing down, and the door of the tipple creaks as it swings. Patches of moonlight and shadow creep slowly over the earth, climb up the walls, move over the heaps of scrap iron and the charred beams.

Red and green fireflies soar everywhere over the steppe, fade and disappear in the grey mist. The German sentries, terrified in this land of coal and iron which they have slaughtered, fire shots into the air, trying to drive away the shadows. But the huge expanses swallow up the weak crackling of the tommy guns, the chill skies

extinguish the glowing tracer bullets, and again the dead, conquered Donetz coal-field strikes terror into the conqueror, and again tommy-gun bursts rattle, and red and green sparks streak across the sky. Everything here bespeaks a frightful obduracy: boilers have burst their iron sides, unwilling to serve the Germans; iron from the open-hearth furnaces has poured out onto the ground; coal has buried itself under great layers of rock, and the mighty power of electricity has burnt out the machines that generated it.

The sight of the dead Donetz Basin evokes not only grief but a great pride. This appalling scene of desolation is not death. It is a testimony to the triumph of life, which scorns death and conquers it.

1943

FIRST DAY ON THE DNIEPER

I

DIVISIONAL Commander General Gorishny met a battalion of Borisov's Regiment on the approaches to the Dnieper. The General stepped out of his car and in slow, clear tones that carried to all the men, addressed the Battalion Commander:

"Captain Ionin," he said, "you will advance to the Dnieper and take up defensive position on the river bank."

Ionin had been informed of the task before the General gave this order. Gorishny was perfectly aware that Ionin knew it. But he deliberately made the solemn announcement in front of the Red Army men, uttering words that were full of the profoundest meaning for those who were advancing at that moment over the fields and forests of the Ukraine.

And no sooner had Gorishny spoken the word "Dnieper" than the battalion stirred as though a gust of wind had struck it and the men raised their rifles cheering lustily.

The first to reach the Dnieper was the battalion commanded by First Lieutenant Gavrilov. The clear swift waters flowed noiselessly by the sandy shore. The sand, white and unbelievably clean, murmured softly underfoot.

The river bed was covered with the same fine sand. It gave a light yellowish tint to the water that flowed by the shore, and the sand glowed softly in its limpid depths now pale blue, now green.

A flat sandy islet overgrown with tall reeds lay in midstream, beyond it gleamed a strip of water and further on the wooded right bank of the Dnieper loomed through the haze. The men ran down to the water's edge to bathe their faces. Many dropped to their knees and drank the Dnieper water with greedy lips, not only because they were thirsty after the long and wearisome march, but because they felt the deep symbolic significance of this action in these moments of exultation.

A year ago General Gorishny's Division repulsed the first attacks launched by the German Sixth Army under Field Marshal Paulus on the great Volga Line at Stalingrad. The fighting took place at Mamayev Hill. The world had never seen such battles. It was not Mamayev Hill that was in question. It was not Stalingrad alone, it

was the fate of Russia, that was at stake. Could anyone who in September helped to repulse the sinister onslaught of the German tank and infantry divisions amid the ruins of Stalingrad on the steep bank of the Volga, surrounded by smoke and flames, deafened by the howl of German dive bombers have believed then that within a year the Red Army would reach the Dnieper along a great victorious front reaching from Smolensk to Dniepropetrovsk? Did the gallant men of Stalingrad ever dream that this would come to pass?

That is why the men, stirred to the depths of their being, knelt in attitudes of solemn devotion on the sandy bank of the Dnieper and quaffed the clear waters of the river. They were witnesses of a great national triumph they had helped to bring about. Behind them lay the hundreds of kilometres they had traversed. One day the story will be told of that path of pain and suffering, of the storms and blizzards, the cruel winds, the autumn mud and the chill rains, of the fearful fire of the German mortars and guns, the heavy self-propelled guns and the T-6 tanks that had attacked the forward units of Soviet infantry from ambuscades.

Some day they would tell how their hearts had been wrung when on a dark, frosty night in December 1941 the Red Army Song and Dance Ensemble had sung to them:

> . . *"O, Dnieper, Dnieper, thou flowest afar,*
> *And thy waters are like tears. . . ."*

The fighting men listening to that song amid the deep Voronezh snows wept unashamedly, and the singers wept with them for the Dnieper, and the Ukraine seemed indeed far off. And now on an autumn day in 1943 our men had reached the Dnieper.

II

IN THE AFTERNOON we went to see General Lazko, commander of a rifle corps, at his command post. The General was sitting at the open window of his cottage. On the table before him lay a map heavily marked in red pencil. Our artillery stationed nearby was firing across the Dnieper. At every volley the windowpanes rattled. Somewhere far ahead the distant roar of an occasional German mine explosion could be heard. The Germans were "tossing" mines across from the other side of the river, as the Red Army men put it. The

Chief of Staff and the Commander of the Artillery were reporting to the General. The conversation was as curt and business-like as a conference of factory managers discussing some problem of production. The matters dealt with as well as the language in which they were discussed strengthened the impression.

Like all the other units and formations Lazko's rifle corps was loosely referred to as the "outfit." But what a huge complex organism it was. The smooth and efficient operation of such an "outfit" is dependent on a hundred and one details all of which must never be lost sight of for a moment. The General and the two Colonels reporting to him discussed roads, ferries, bridges, anti-aircraft equipment, fuel, repair stations, pontoons that had lagged behind the troops, divers types of ammunition, food supplies, rafts and boats, the morale of the men. They spoke in low tones, examining reports concerning delivery of shells to the action stations for the regimental and company guns and for the heavy artillery, about ammunition for the long-range guns and ammunition en route. They conferred anxiously, as they traced the lengthy supply lines on the map. There were dozens, nay, hundreds of problems to be solved, before the huge, complex and variegated mechanism of the rifle corps could be made to operate smoothly, to full capacity, with the maximum of effect and the minimum of losses.

One of the most important elements of a smooth-working military mechanism is communications. To maintain constant, uninterrupted contact with companies, battalions, regiments and divisions under conditions of modern warfare with the army constantly on the move, constantly subject to sudden changes in the situation, with an experienced and cunning enemy doing his best to disrupt the normal functioning of communications, is no easy task. Moreover, contact must be maintained with the reinforcements, with the tank and air forces, with neighbouring units on the right and the left. The radio, the telephone, the telegraph, despatch riders and liaison officers all form part of this complex organism. If we take a single element in the system of communications, the radio, for example, and consider how much intensive labour must be expended to keep it working smoothly—all the work of coding and decoding messages, the job of keeping the delicate apparatus functioning under field and fighting conditions, of protecting it from the inquisitive German planes—and if we remember that the radio is only one of the ele-

ments of communications which in turn is but one item in the great sum of modern warfare we may form some idea of the strain under which the modern army commander works. Contemporary wars are fought with machines. Aeroplanes, cannons and Katyusha mortars are not a whit simpler than the most intricate machinery and equipment of modern industry. And it must be remembered that the job of war has to be carried on in the teeth of a strong and experienced enemy who exerts tremendous efforts day and night to disrupt communications, destroy bridges, burn and blow up stores, destroy columns on the march, wreck telephone and telegraph wires, listen in, swoop down with his tanks and aircraft and lay sudden artillery barrages on our battle formations.

Great are the honours showered on our generals, our commanders of divisions, corps and armies. Generous the decorations with which their efforts are rewarded. But great too is the burden of responsibility they must bear. Not for a second dare they forget that burden, dare they forget that they are responsible for the success of the battles, for the speedy and total defeat of the enemy, for the cleansing of our land of the invaders. They are responsible to the millions of mothers, who have sent their sons to the war, for the slightest negligence, the slightest inaccuracy, the slightest hitch in the working of the military mechanism has to be paid for in the precious blood of the fighting men.

All our generals and officers must remember this grave responsibility they bear for the lives of the fighting men, to the mothers of our great country, they must not forget this for a second and must bear this moral burden with honour and dignity.

Perhaps that is why there is such a look of anxiety and concern on the faces of the General and the Colonels conferring in the cottage on the banks of the Dnieper, discussing the knotty problems of sending men, guns, supplies and ammunition across the river and moving up the lagging rear services, the bases and fuel supplies.

III

AT CRITICAL moments in a war the smooth operation of the rear services and the proper co-ordination of all the arms are as important as the plans and calculations of line commanders. At decisive moments success depends in great measure also on the fortunes of

war, on self-sacrifice, on feats of valour, on morale, on what at times appears to be reckless bravery, on the ability to take advantage of every lucky chance that may turn up.

When the slanting rays of the early morning sun gleamed on the smooth surface of the river, a slight throbbing noise was heard in the distance coming from the direction of Kiev and the sentries on the lookout at the water's edge reported that a steamer was approaching. Gavrilin, the Battalion Commander, ordered his men to take cover and not to open fire without orders. Presently a steamer's funnel appeared around the bend. The boat moved very slowly. It was towing a loaded barge and the current in the elbow of the river was strong. On deck stood a man. Through his field glasses the Battalion Commander could see the non-commissioned officer's stripes on his German uniform. The Nazi was also scrutinizing the river's bank through his binoculars. When the steamer came abreast Gavrilin ordered his men to open fire. A dozen tommy guns spoke in unison, and several anti-tank rifles rent the still morning air with a deafening report. Several men leapt to their feet and hurled grenades at the boat. The vessel spat back a hail of machine-gun bullets. Its helmsman swung the ship sharply around and brought it over to the opposite bank. The German crew leapt ashore and ran up the river bank just as the men from Lieutenant Kondakov's company who had rowed across from our side reached the boat.

It so happened that the first man to climb aboard the vessel was Second Lieutenant Dmitri Yarzhin who had worked as a marine engineer on the Volga before the war. Sukhinin, one of the men in his platoon, had been a helmsman on a river boat. Between them they ferried the whole battalion across to the right bank of the Dnieper within an hour and then came back for the rest of the division. At one point several Messerschmitts flew over, but Maximov, the second in command, ordered the men off the deck and the "Messers" passed over evidently assuming that the boat was theirs. True, the Germans soon realized their mistake and sent over some more planes. With ninety-three holes in its hull the boat ceased to function. But it had done its bit. The barge it towed was loaded with logs, boards and nails and soon hundreds of able hands were busy with hammers and axes making pontoons and rafts.

We saw several of these first bridgeheads on the Dnieper; saw the tremendous uplift, the spontaneous enthusiasm of the men and

officers of the Red Army who in those first hours and days eagerly, nay, joyously, shouldered the main burden of the onerous operation. Without waiting for the pontoon and other ferry equipment to arrive, the men who had reached the banks of the Dnieper crossed the broad and rapid river on rafts, fishing boats and rude pontoons made of barrels covered with boards, crossed under a hurricane of enemy artillery and mortar fire, under the ferocious hammering of German bombers and fighter planes. There were times when the men ferried regimental guns across the river on rafts improvised out of gates and tent-capes stuffed with straw.

It was this enthusiasm that helped the Red Army to gain a foothold on the right bank of the Dnieper. While the main forces were being moved up to the river bank, while the building of bridges and laying of pontoons was being started, and the tanks and heavy artillery began to cross protected by a heavy curtain of anti-aircraft artillery, and the roar of our fighter planes had filled the air over the Dnieper from dawn till dusk, by that time our infantry armed with machine guns, light field guns and trench mortars was holding the bridgehead on the right bank, waging a fierce struggle with the Germans, upsetting their calculations and dashing their hopes of preventing us from crossing the river.

This combination of bold inspiration and cool calculation, of guerilla tactics with the mighty power of guns, tanks and aeroplanes, the combination of scientific warfare and the inspired, reckless courage of the brave—it is this synthesis that constitutes one of the distinguishing features of our Red Army.

This is something the splendidly trained, well-armed and experienced army of the German fascists did not possess.

IV

IT WAS one of those lovely evenings which often occur in the Ukraine in autumn. The broad, semi-transparent beams of the setting sun reminiscent of a Doré drawing lit up the western bank of the Dnieper. The clouds on the horizon glowed from within like great lanterns filled with a soft roseate light. The pine forests in the distance were silhouetted darkly against a sky luminous with the serene beauty of eventide. And on earth a great tongue of red flame burst from a cloud of black smoke that hovered over a burning village and

blinding flashes of shell explosions and gunfire rent the evening calm. The battle for the Dnieper bridgehead was in progress.

Dark German planes flew low over the river banks filling the air with the ugly guttural croak of their machine-gun bursts.

And strangely enough there was a profound bond between this lovely, luminous twilight sky and the inferno that raged on the ground. The din of the battle for freedom seemed to blend harmoniously with the serene nobility of the sky.

That evening we sat on logs outside General Gorishny's Headquarters, which was housed in an abandoned German fort. The massive logs exuded the invigorating scent of pine tar.

Gorishny was telling us about the progress of the fighting. The furious battles raging on the right bank of the Dnieper reminded us all of the Battle of Stalingrad. The Germans were counter-attacking viciously again and again. Self-propelled guns, heavy mortars, artillery and aircraft supported the German infantry which attacked several times a day in a vain effort to throw our forces back into the Dnieper. Grenade fighting and hand-to-hand skirmishes in which our men fought with bayonets and trenching tools were constantly breaking out. Men kept coming to the field dressing station with bayonet and knife wounds. It had been very hard to dig in at first when the fighting was still limited to a narrow strip of beach, for hardly would the men dig a half-metre trench in the sand than the water would rise and ruin their work. Now that our troops were extending their foothold step by step, now that not only the infantry but our powerful materiel was entrenched on the right bank and the men began to feel firm ground beneath their feet and thousands instead of tens of metres of terrain behind them, in addition to all the kilometres they had covered en route to the Dnieper, there was no force in the world that could turn them back, no force that could check our advance.

Gorishny went over to the telephone installed in a narrow trench to talk to the commanders who were leading the action. He spoke to them in the same calm voice with the slight Ukrainian drawl in which he had spoken to us. He called many of the commanders by Christian name and patronymic for the men of this Division had been comrades-in-arms for a long time now. And perhaps it was because of his strong, unshakable faith in the men who had fought with him at Mamayev Hill and at the Barricades Plant on the great

Volga Line that his voice sounded so calm as he talked to them now while the battle raged.

Now and then Gorishny would pause to listen to the chaos of sounds that filled the air. His trained ear told him what was happening on the battlefield, which unit had opened fire, which battalion was being subjected to enemy fire. He read the cacophony of battle as easily as an orchestra conductor reads a symphony score. The blood of many of the brave who had fought at Stalingrad flowed freely under the serene heavens that looked down upon an earth enveloped in smoke and flame. Someone came in with the report that Galya Chabannaya of the ambulance battalion had been killed. Gorishny and his second in command Colonel Vlasenko cried out at the news.

"God," groaned Gorishny, "I can still hear that merry laugh of hers. Remember what fun we had playing snowballs at the stations en route from Stalingrad? No one in the whole division could laugh as gaily as she."

Major Maximov, assistant commander of a regiment, was wounded. He was the one who had fooled the German flyers on that first day on the Dnieper crossing.

First Lieutenant Surkov, assistant commander of a battalion, came in. He had not slept for six nights. His face was covered with a bristly stubble. Yet so carried away was he by the exhilaration of battle that he showed no signs of fatigue. A half an hour hence he might fall asleep with his head resting on his despatch case and then it would not be easy to wake him. But now his eyes were shining, his voice was firm and excited. This man who had taught history before the war seemed to carry within him the flame of the Battle of the Dnieper. Surkov told us about the German counter-attacks, about our thrusts, he told us how he had seen a runner buried in a trench by an explosion and how when he had dug him out the man turned out to be a former pupil of his. Surkov had taught him history and now he and his pupil were making history that would be taught in schools hundreds of years hence.

The evening sky grew ever more noble and serene. And underneath that sky on the cold Dnieper sand lay the body of a young girl who had laughed more gaily than anyone else in this division that had come all the way from the Volga.

October 10, 1943

HOW CAN I describe our emotion when we set eyes again on the little white cottages, the ponds overgrown thickly with rushes, the tall poplars and the dahlias peeping over the fencetops; how can I tell you how we felt when the earth and sky wafted the gentle breath of the Ukraine in our faces and she stood before us in all her untold charm, in her sorrow and her wrath, in the rich fecundity of her soil, in the fire-gutted ruins, the sweetness of her blooming gardens, in fire and in tears.

Yes, it is not a simple emotion and it is not easy to describe. But it is felt by all of us: by the army generals and by the great infantry, bleary-eyed from sleeplessness, overtaking the tanks and aircraft in their ceaseless anguished advance. For what can be fleeter, lighter or truer than the movement of men who are liberating themselves and their native land, who are marching forward day and night, in rain and mud, waist deep in water, pushing their way through the prickly brambles in dense forests, ploughing up the rich soil of the rain-sodden fields with their boots. Neither bird nor aeroplane can match that speed.

What is it then, this feeling that impels men with drawn haggard faces to keep going, though stumbling with exhaustion, to lift cracked voices in song, to sleep in a ditch under the rain and to smile as they sleep, to go to their death with glory in their hearts? What is it then, this feeling that makes old men run forward at the sound of Russian speech to meet our troops and then to weep silently unable to utter a word, and wise old peasant women to say softly in surprise: "We thought we'd laugh and sing when at last we set eyes on you but there is pain and sadness in our hearts, and the tears flow." What is it, this emotion? It is born of a consciousness of the unity of people, a consciousness that is awakened by suffering, amid the groans of the children and the aged perishing in the flames, and that is why the hearts of the toiling Ukrainian people overflow when they meet their brothers coming to them from Siberia, from the Volga, from the Kazakh steppes.

We all experience that queer sensation of reliving the past as our armies advance westward by the very same roads along which they retreated to the East in the autumn of 1941. We are liberating

cities relinquished to the Germans in those terrible days of August, September and October 1941. We are marching westward not only in space but also in time. Orel, Volkhov, Mtsensk, Kharkov, Belgorod and Stalino are liberated and we are back again in October 1941. Smolensk, Glukhov, Roslavl, Poltava, Nezhin, Chernigov are free and thus our people set the great iron wheel of Time in place and we are marching again through September 1941. Now Kremenchug is ours, our troops are storming German fascism in Kiev, Dniepropetrovsk, Gomel and Moghilev and we are back again in August 1941. The day is not far off when the Red Army will reach the frontiers so perfidiously violated by the fascists and will triumphantly return to our people and to mankind that hour of dawn on June twenty-second, that hour when the whining of German aircraft engines filled our skies and our frontier post crumpled under the treads of the blunt-nosed German tanks. On that day we shall prove finally and conclusively that it is not for fascism to steer the wheel of Time, we shall set the clock of history right and we shall say: time stolen by the fascist beast is returned to man, to reason, to labour and to history.

New cities shall rise in place of those that have been razed, the fields rank with weeds shall again be planted with grain, young forests shall grow up, pretty white cottages shall spring up on the sites of the sacked villages, the Donbas, land of coal and steel, will come back to life. But there is no power on earth that can revive our dead mothers and sons, no power that can smooth out the lines of pain and care, that can return sight to the blind, restore their youth to those whose hair has turned white. That is why people so often weep when they come to welcome our army, for their great joy at liberation is mingled with a great sorrow. And no doubt the last day of the war will be not only a day of joy and triumph in victory, but a day also of tears and sadness as we remember all those who fell in battle, all those who were tortured to death, burned and buried alive, all those who perished in slavery, who died of starvation behind the barbed wire of German concentration camps.

Yes, only once is it given to a people to experience such an emotion. Our men are eager to know how the Ukraine has lived these years. For two years the Chernigov and Kiev Regions were part of the German rear, for two years the Dnieper area was cut off from us by a wall three hundred versts wide. This was the remote

rear of the German forces, the land where German fascism considered itself the master for all time.

As soon as our troops enter a village, the people emerge from the woods, from the thickets, from the swamps overgrown with tall reeds.

Only the very naive could believe that the fascists behaved with more restraint in the rear than at the front, that the people living under Nazi yoke within 300 kilometres of the front were given elementary rights and guaranteed the minimum conditions for existence. No, a thousand times no! I saw dozens of villages razed by the Germans on the Desna, on the banks of the Dnieper, in Mezhdurechye, that lovely fertile valley between the Desna and the Dnieper, which the Germans turned into a hell of torture and suffering. I saw the village of Kozary, between Nezhin and Kozelets, where crosses stand amid the fire-gutted ruins of houses. Thousands of old folk, women and children were driven into these cottages and burned alive. The crosses were put there by the relatives of the victims whose charred bones are mingled with the ashes.

I have seen the razed village of Suvid on the right bank of the Desna which shared the martyrdom of Kozary; I have seen the adjacent villages of Voropayevo, Staroye Voropayevo and Zhukin. I have seen the burnt-out village of Kuvechichi west of Chernigov, saw Bodyanki and Komarovka. I have seen dozens of villages in the Chernigov and Kiev Regions the Germans had razed during their retreat beyond the Dnieper. The fires are still smouldering, the heavy odour of burnt clay hovers in the air and tens of thousands of old folk and children left homeless are sitting under the lowering autumn sky hiding from the rain and wind in rude shelters made of branches and bunches of straw that somehow survived the fire.

Fascism has abandoned the practice of individual executions and murders. Fascism no longer shoots and executes individuals, it slaughters entire villages and towns. Crews of incendiaries and tommy-gunners equipped with incendiary bullets set fire to flourishing villages, they murder streets, blocks and towns.

We drove through Glukhov, Krolevets, Nezhin, Kozelets, Oster, and Chernigov. Lovely Chernigov has been slain by the Germans, not a single building has survived. Oster and Glukhov have been terribly maimed. Kozelets was left unhurt. Our troops drove the

Germans out before they had a chance to destroy this green and pleasant Ukrainian town. Two days later an armada of German bombers swooped down on Kozelets dropping high-explosive bombs on its defenceless one-storey cottages standing amid gardens. Now Kozelets too is dead. The German aircraft did the work of the incendiaries. One perceives a plan, a single organizing force behind all this destruction. We know that a similar fate befell the cities of the Donetz Basin, the Kharkov and Poltava Regions.

It may be safely said that mankind in all its history has never known crimes of such utter cruelty, such hideous brutality. Huge areas, dozens and hundreds of cities, thousands of villages laid waste; millions of children, old people, women, prisoners and wounded slaughtered, entire great nations enslaved.

Every Red Army man, every officer and general of the Red Army who has seen the Ukraine in blood and flames, who has heard the people's story of what happened in the Ukraine in the two years of German domination, knows with all his heart, with every fibre of his being that there are two sacred words in our language today. One of them is *love*, the other *vengeance*.

The essence of fascism is such that it is as dreadful in its most sanguinary and vicious form as in its "peaceful" social manifestations.

I have visited districts and villages which escaped the fascist clutches alive. Towns and villages are much like people, some of them died a martyr's death by flames or incendiary bullets. Others, heavily wounded and bleeding to death, managed to survive and are now slowly recovering. And there are lucky villages in which the Germans did not burn a single house, did not execute a single inhabitant and did not have time to send anyone to slavery.

Yet in these unscathed villages the hatred for the Germans is just as violent. The Ukrainian language is rich in curse words but I do not think there is a single expression I have not heard used by old folk villagers in speaking of the Germans.

By their boastful arrogance, their swinishness and their insatiable greed the fascists deeply insulted the human and national dignity of the Ukrainian villagers.

Traces of the German fascist "order" are still in evidence. The signs and names of streets are written in large German lettering with the Ukrainian equivalent barely visible beneath. In some places there

are no Ukrainian signs at all. Evidently the fascists thought that the Chernigov and Kiev villagers ought to be able to speak German.

In the villages the Germans performed their natural functions on doorsteps, in passages or in the gardens under the windows, in front of women and girls. At mealtime they broke wind loudly and with bawdy laughter, thrust their fingers into the common platter and tore at the meat with their hands. They walked about naked in front of the peasants, quarrelled and fought one another over every trifle. Their gluttony, their ability to devour two dozen eggs, a kilo of honey and a huge pot of sour cream at one go evoked the scorn and contempt of the villagers.

The mercenary haggling, the petty swindling in which the Germans indulged amazed the Ukrainians. They were more surprised than annoyed when the Germans tried to pass off broken knives or useless cigarette lighters in exchange for honey, eggs and pork, or when they frauded and swindled not only the peasants but one another.

The German district and ward commandants shocked the Ukrainians by their coarseness, their gluttony and weakness for the bottle.

German soldiers resting in the rear villages spent their entire time hunting for food, gorging themselves, swilling liquor and playing cards.

Judging by the statements of war prisoners and the letters found on the dead soldiers it was obvious that the Germans in the Ukraine considered themselves representatives of a superior race living among rustic barbarians. They felt that their cultured habits could be discarded in these savage eastern regions. And hence they walked about naked in the presence of the village women, made obscene noises when the old folk sat down to supper, and gorged themselves until they vomited.

And the neat, intelligent, fastidious Ukrainian peasant looked with disgust and scorn at the fascist "conquerors."

"Is that culture?" I heard them say. "They told us the Germans were cultured. Now we know what Hitlerite culture is like. They said we weren't cultured. But our people would never think of doing what the Germans did here."

I especially recall a talk I had with an old peasant named Pavel Vassilyevich. The old man was a passionate gardener and his eyes shone when he spoke of the apple trees he had grown. His whole

outlook on life and nature was the outlook of a sensitive artist. He was a worshipper of beauty, an aesthete in the highest sense of the word.

When he folded his arms and said softly, his tired eyes half closed: "Is there anything lovelier in the world than a young apple tree?" I felt that the whole gentle soul of the Ukrainian people was expressed in this old peasant. The Germans did him no personal harm and his daughters had escaped German slavery. But with what scorn, what pitiless contempt he spoke of the Germans, of how they defiled his garden and the steps of his tidy little cottage, how disgustingly they had behaved at table. But of course the behaviour of the fascists in the Ukrainian village is but one minor detail, one insignificant aspect of the tremendous, triumphant Prusso-fascist swinishness that sought to take root in the soil of the Ukraine.

The German system of rural economy showed the Ukrainian peasantry quite clearly what the Germans wanted from the Ukraine.

The collective farms were turned into "*gromady*" and group farms. In 1943 the district and ward commandants began, through the medium of elders and rural burgomasters, to organize what was known as "*desyatikhatki*," or a system of farming by ten homesteads.

The German fascist "*gromada*" threw farming back 70 or 80 years. It brought back the wooden plough, the scythe, the flail and the primitive hand-mill.

Our state rendered tremendous aid to the collective farms in the way of implements, fuel and monetary loans.

During their two years of domination the fascists gave the peasants of the Kiev and Chernigov Regions nothing whatever. The peasants either hauled the ploughs themselves or harnessed cows or miserable, half-starved nags to them. Strangely enough, all the Germans brought in from Germany were a few threshing machines.

The fascists added three or four-tenths of hectare to every farmstead (a hectare is 2.47 acres) bringing the peasant's private allotment up to one hectare. They made this the occasion for tremendous campaign of demagogy, only to impose subsequently such heavy burdens on the peasantry that the rich Ukrainian collective farmers in one year found themselves reduced to the status of serfs united in hard labour under the policeman's knout.

In 1942 the Germans laid hands on the entire rich harvest in most

of the villages leaving the collective farmers with the hunger ration of 200 grams of bread per person.

Each farm was obliged to deliver 100 kilograms of meat, 300 eggs, and 600 litres of milk per cow. Moreover, a per capita tax was levied on the farms. The flour mills took such an exorbitant price for milling the grain that the peasants preferred to use hand-mills made of shell cases and wooden blocks clad in iron. These crude home-made grist mills had to be used secretly because the authorities confiscated them and persecuted the peasants who used them. To mill the grain with these rude grist mills was an arduous painful business.

Speaking of the German policy in the countryside, the peasants used to say: "The land is ours but the crop belongs to the Germans, the cows are ours but the milk is the Germans'."

The fascists shipped out of the country a vast quantity of valuables in the two years of their domination, but not a box of matches, not a gram of kerosene, not a centimetre of cloth did they give to the Ukrainian village. The village stores stood empty. Here and there a few barter points were organized where the fascists exchanged salt for eggs and fowl at a ridiculously high rate.

The economic policy of German fascism in the Ukrainian village was distinguished by a stupid, blatant frankness. It was downright robbery. The whole Ukrainian people thus enslaved realized this.

It is interesting to note that in the latter period the elders and burgomasters, *i.e.*, those who betrayed their people, pursued a dual policy and attempted to protect the interests of the peasants by deceiving the Germans.

The fascists by their own behaviour destroyed the myth they had invented of their organizational genius.

The one trait common to all their methods was the readinesss with which they resorted to corporal punishment and abuse. A schoolteacher who had escaped from Kiev a few days before told us how she and her companion, a woman doctor, had gone into the German officers' dining room at a railway station to warm themselves. The German waitress had signed to them to leave the place. It was bitterly cold outside and the women lingered. Whereupon the girl walked right up to these two mature, refined Russian women and began to shoo them off the premises as she might some chickens that had strayed in. "How dare you?" said the doctor livid with indignation.

The girl looked in haughty surprise at this grey-haired woman who had the audacity to speak to her, and, raising her hand, slapped the Russian woman's face. The same blind, bigoted sense of superiority, the same contempt for a great nation was common to all the German officials in the Ukraine, both military and civilian.

The Ukrainian people, the people of the free Cossacks, the people of the Zaporozhye Sech, the people who have created some of the loveliest melodies in the world, who have transformed their land into a flourishing garden and waving fields of golden grain, this proud, dignified people rose up against the fascist invaders. Entire districts of the Ukraine were in the hands of the partisans. The Germans were unable to use dozens of the most important roads because they were controlled by the partisans.

In many places the partisans gave the elders and burgomasters orders concerning the harvests and the elders carried out these orders implicitly because the partisans were a much more tangible force than the Germans. The police abandoned dozens of villages in the Chernigov Region and moved with their families to the safety of the towns.

Evidence of a titanic struggle presented itself when we arrived in the area of Mezhdurechye in the wooded and marshy wedge between the Desna and the Dnieper. Grey charred skeletons of the German war machines lay on all the forest paths. Everything here bore witness to the fear struck in the hearts of the Germans by the partisans. The Germans cut down the woods for hundreds of metres on either side of the roads to keep the partisans that much farther away. In many villages we found powerful fortifications made of thick pine logs surrounded by trenches fronted by barbed wire and connected by a maze of communication trenches. On the forest fringes stood forts, dugouts and embrasures facing the thickets: this was the "inner wall" the Germans built to stem the partisan tide that rose menacingly in the pine woods of the Dnieper area. On village wells we found notices in German and Ukrainian announcing that the water was fit for drinking, that it was not poisoned and that so-and-so was responsible for its purity. All this testified to the bitter struggle the Ukrainian partisans waged against the invaders. In every village you can hear stories of the bold partisan raids on German garrisons, of German machines set ablaze and German supplies captured.

And now they are emerging from their forest strongholds, the

gallant Ukrainian people's army. It is impossible to gaze unmoved at these bearded grandpas, these callow youths with their jaunty Cossack hats and the saucy tufts of hair over their foreheads, at the young and middle-aged women with shawls on their heads, marching along with rifles, German tommy guns and grenades at their waists. The wheels of the partisan supply carts creak and the horses neigh softly. The gunners sit on German guns mounted on the front of farm carts, the drivers urge on the horses whose hoofs sink in the white river sand. Who are they, these men and women dressed in civilian jackets, in army coats, in German uniforms, in peasant blouses, in old-fashioned caps, Cossack hats, kepi and old crumpled forage caps? Who are they, these old men, and youths, these bearded middle-aged stalwarts? Who are they who come from the forests, galloping on horseback along the Dnieper banks, building fires between the huge coppery-trunked pines? They are the great, the eternal, the indomitable spirit of the people, its pride, its courage, its freedom, its dignity. They are the soul of the Ukraine. The fascists could not kill it. And yet the fascists did their best. The world has never known such terror, such bloody brutality. The Germans declared that if a peasant joins the partisans his family, his wife, mother and children are to be locked up in their homes and burned alive. And yet they come, tens of thousands of partisans, the eternal free spirit of the Ukraine, the men and women for whom freedom is the most precious thing on earth. They come bringing the shadow of death in their hearts.

These lines are written not far from Kiev. One bleak windy morning we met a boy on the outskirts of the village of Tarasevichy near the Dnieper. A lad of about thirteen or fourteen. He was incredibly thin, his greyish skin was drawn tightly over his gaunt cheeks, there were large bumps on his skull, his lips were as grimy and bloodless as the lips of a corpse that has fallen face downward on the ground. His eyes had a look of infinite weariness, they expressed neither joy nor sorrow. They were lifeless. There is something terrible about the weary, lifeless eyes of children who have seen too much.

"Where is your father?"

"Killed," he replied.

"And your mother?"

"Dead."

"Have you any brothers or sisters?"

"I had a sister but she was shipped to Germany."

"Have you any relatives?"

"No, they were burned alive in a partisan village."

He turned and walked off over the potato field, drawing his tattered shirt closer to his gaunt body, his bare grimy feet sinking into the soft earth.... These lines are written not far from Kiev. We can see it from here. The cupolas of the Monastery are glistening and the roofs of the tall buildings can be discerned through the haze of distance....

People who have come from Kiev say that the Germans have placed a cordon of troops around the huge grave in Baby Yar where the bodies of 50,000 Jews slaughtered in Kiev at the end of September 1941 are buried. They are feverishly digging up the corpses and burning them.

Are they so mad as to hope thus to hide their evil traces that have been branded forever by the tears and the blood of the Ukraine, branded so that it will burn brightly on the darkest night.

October 1943

1944

REFLECTIONS ON THE SPRING OFFENSIVE

I

THE SUN has risen over the vast spaces of southern Ukraine. The dark clouds have vanished from the sky, a warm wind is blowing and the swollen, rain-soaked earth has begun to dry, to rid itself of the thousands of tons of water precipitated during the long days and nights of November, December, January, February and March. For many years this flat land of dry winter winds has not seen such quantities of moisture. They say the winter of 1929 was a wet one. But old-timers claim that it cannot be compared with last winter. The earth spread in a wet slushy bog for tens and hundreds of thousands of kilometres with no firm frozen crust beneath. Gun wheels, tractor treads, the hoofs of horses and oxen sank in this quagmire. The boots of the infantrymen stuck in the sticky, squelchy mush. Even the U-2 planes, flying low through the grey mist, seemed to be attracted by the fearful weight of the earth.

When you fly today over the Dnieper, the Ingulets and Ingul, over the labyrinth of streams and brooks, over the Bug and its estuary you can see the deep furrowed traces of wheels and caterpillar treads criss-crossing the drying earth. Like rivers that overflow their banks the offensive overflowed the grader roads, highways, dirt roads, paths and cobbled roads. The road beds could not hold the throbbing, perspiring body of our advancing army and so it moved forward over the entire breadth of the steppes.

The sun is shining brighter and brighter and trucks are already raising light clouds of dust and the swarthy Captain, the skirts of whose coat are caked with rusty brown and grey flakes of earth, inhales the dust with pleasure and says, smilingly:

"Och, but that mud was the very devil. This dust smells wonderful, don't it?"

A few days ago the air here was filled with the piercing whine of one and a half ton trucks, three and five ton trucks, tractors, transporters, Dodges and Studebakers. They roared and whined as they strove desperately to extricate themselves from the clinging claws of mud, to keep up with the infantry, and their wheels revolving wildly but helplessly, sprayed mud thickly about them as they sank deeper and deeper into the oily ruts. And thousands of sinewy, spare, sweating men set their teeth and hauled, hauled day and night

under the eternal rain and the soft wet snow, pulling the huge rear of the advancing army. They hauled with their guts, hauled by the sheer force of their will, their thirst for victory, their mad fever of vengeance and their infinite patience.

And now all those who took part in this terrific, backbreaking job, all the muscles and sinews of this unparalleled offensive, from generals to Red Army men, are looking back and measuring the vast distance they have traversed in an effort to grasp the full purport of what happened during the months of this fearful, single combat between the Red Army and the fascist troops on the fields and plains of the Ukraine. Who believed that an offensive would be possible in this roadless area, in a winter of rain and sleet, and a spring in which dozens of rivers and hundreds of streams overflowed their banks, in a chill hell of mists, rain and melting snow, in sticky clayey mud, in the soaked black soil, in the slime of the everglades, the low swampy banks, swollen rivers big with the sea's proximity?

And yet that offensive had come to pass.

On January 30, 1944 reconnaissance in force undertaken by a battalion from each division commenced to probe the German defences in the Nikopol area. It was a frosty day. The men's feet did not sink in mud, the thin ice crunched pleasantly under their boots and the earth was delightfully firm. The machine-gun bursts and gunfire echoed clearly through the air. The German Dnieper defences were built solidly and skilfully. It consisted of full-depth trenches, a network of communication trenches, substantial well-protected dugouts for the men to take cover and warm up. In front of the defences were rows of barbed-wire entanglements and mine fields. The defences were backed by Hitler's hysterical order to Colonel-General Hollidt to hold the Nikopol salient at all costs. The defences were fortified by detailed directives circulated among the army officers. The *place d'armes* was the door to the Crimea. It exerted political pressure on Antonescu who was concerned for the fate of the ten Rumanian divisions trapped by General Tolbukhin's forces in the Crimea. It protected Nikopol manganese which supplied the whole of German iron and steel industry operating east of Berlin. It protected Krivoi Rog with its untold wealth of magnificent blood-red iron ore. The soldiers were reminded that they were fighting in an army of "vengeance"; it bore the same number as Field Marshal Paulus' army

which perished at Stalingrad and had been formed by Hitler for the purpose of revenge. Moreover, the defences were strengthened by the unusually favourable terrain with its numerous gullies, ditches and heights.

Such were the German defences in the lower reaches of the Dnieper. How much more favourable than our Stalingrad defences in the lower reaches of the Volga crowded into a narrow strip of land atop a steep bank.

And as luck, or perhaps Fate would have it, this new Sixth Army clashed with Chuikov's Stalingrad Army. In the autumn of 1942 the Sixth Army had swooped down on the Volga, descending upon our defences like a battering ram. Here on the Dnieper the tables were turned: it was the Red Army that was advancing and Hollidt's Sixth Army that was on the defensive. There in Stalingrad at the critical moment of the great Patriotic War huge masses of Paulus' panzered forces, supported by Richthofen's air squadrons, hurled themselves against the Volga defence line for a period of one hundred days and nights. There on that line the world saw the offensive strategy of the German Command suffer a smashing defeat. There the German offensive dashed itself to pieces against the staunchness of the Russian infantry, against the annihilating skilfully directed force of Soviet artillery. There in cruel ordeals and trials, with Death staring them fearfully, hungrily in the face, the men, officers and generals of the Red Army stood their ground, demonstrating their strength, their patience, their skill, their iron will and nobility of spirit. Along with the bodies of dead Germans, along with the assault and grenadier divisions that were wiped out, along with the tanks and Stukas dive bombers that were reduced to heaps of scorched and twisted metal, the doctrine of the world hegemony of fascism, the doctrine of the offensive strategy of the German forces was wiped out and destroyed. After Stalingrad Hitlerism began to talk about defence, after Stalingrad fascism commenced to shout about the "Eastern wall," the "Dnieper wall," the "Leningrad-Odessa" line, about preserving the occupied lands and plundered wealth. Before Stalingrad fascism had spoken of other things—of world domination, for example. And now the divisions of the Red Army which had defended Stalingrad in the autumn of 1942 were preparing in January 1944 to strike a decisive blow at the German Sixth Army which had passed over to the defensive in the Nikopol area on the lower Dnie-

per. The tables had indeed turned. Behind the Red Army were the Kursk and Orel salients, the battles for Kharkov and the Severny Donetz, the crossing of the Dnieper in its middle reaches and the Battle of Kiev.

On January 30 the Germans mistook our reconnaissance in force supported by artillery for a general offensive. Their self-assurance once again cost them dearly. It is now known that the German generals blame one another for the disaster. In their memoranda they blame Klaus, Chief of Staff of the 30th Army Division, for "incorrectly appraising the situation, underestimating the opponent and overestimating our own forces." All this is true, of course. What is not true is that Klaus is the only guilty party. For this stupid arrogance with regard to the opponent, this highhanded superiority is an organic failing of the German fascist state and its military. It was the fault of the foundation and not the roof.

On the evening of January 30 the Germans patted themselves on the back. Of course, their defences had proved impregnable. Of course, the Red Guards divisions had been unable to smash them. And, of course, this was passed on in the usual boastful terms to the superior officers.

And on that very night our command was completing a swift and decisive manœuvre. This manœuvre was the best proof of the maturity both in mind and spirit of the men who had gone through tremendous ordeals and emerged the stronger and wiser for their experience. The direction of the blow was wisely chosen, the huge heavy fist was swiftly and resolutely clenched and raised, the decision to leave only screening forces on the less important sectors bolstered by mine fields alone was boldly taken.

At dawn the offensive began. The sky trembled when the voice of our artillery reverberated over the hoary steppeland. The earth shook. With the steel jaws of their guns the Guards gnawed at the enemy's defences. The battle grew hourly more tense. Some felt that this might be a repetition of the Battle of Stalingrad. The thin crust of ice on the puddles shivered like window glass from the thunder of our heavy guns. The Germans fought both stubbornly and well. But it was not only the military maturity of our men and commanders that overwhelmed the skill and stubbornness of the Germans. Grandeur of spirit and the nobility of purpose triumphed in this battle over the low morale of the army of child-killers. The ideals of humanity

and kindness became the elements of our war potential, became part and parcel of the fighting theory and practice of the Red Army, merged with the tactical methods employed by our generals and officers. The smooth co-ordination of the huge masses of armed forces directed by the High Command, the teamwork of the rifle company and artillery commanders who watched the battlefield with brotherly concern from their observation points in the advance positions, the close contact between the tanks and artillery and between the observation planes and the land forces were all manifestations of the spirit of collectivism that is the motive force of our people, the unity of a righteous cause and an exalted goal.

By evening Corps Commander Glazunov had success to report from his narrow sector of the front: a deep dent had been made in the German defences. And here again our tactics reflected national characteristics formed in the course of centuries combined with the traits of the young revolutionary country, a country of bold innovators in all spheres of human endeavour. The resolution with which Tanaschishin's full-blooded tank corps was hurled into the narrow breach, the speed with which a local setback suffered by the enemy turned into a major catastrophe were all manifestations of the Bolshevik energy and resolution, the ability to seize upon the principal link in the complex chain of events. By morning the breach had been widened to such an extent that the Germans were threatened with encirclement and destruction.

Our artillery operations throughout the breakthrough of the German defences constitute an instructive example of skill and absolute freedom from conservatism. The entire vast artillery orchestra switched with ease from one stage of the fighting to the next, at the same time not only setting the pace for infantry and tank action but subordinating itself to it, not only operating according to a previously worked out plan but reacting at once to every new situation that cropped up in the course of the fighting. It is by no means easy at the white-hot tempo of mobile fighting to switch over from the silencing of previously spotted enemy fire nests to supporting the attacking infantry, from destroying newly-discovered targets to softening up defences in depth, silencing German guns on the flanks and in front of the units that have rushed forward to charge the enemy positions. Such work demands great strength of spirit, tremendous concentration of attention and will, swift reactions and courage.

These qualities our Soviet men possessed. The Germans tried to parry our outflanking manœuvre by a counter-move. Had they not always boasted of their mobility? But their luck had turned. They overreached themselves and instead of a manœuvre the result was more like an aimless feverish rushing from place to place. The mobility and manœuvrability of the Germans had degenerated into its opposite. The horror of encirclement loomed hourly larger and more terrifying in the fevered brain of the German soldiers and generals. This fear born in Stalingrad had taken root in the German consciousness, sowing confusion from platoon to army headquarters. It was this fear that induced staff officers to order withdrawal at the slightest sign of danger, this fear forced German machine-gunners and mortar men to glance furtively westward, to peer into the shadows evoked by their imagination, and to run, abandoning their weapons, when straggling infantrymen frightened them with panicky rumours. This fear underlay the actions of the commanders of German infantry regiments and tank battalions.

By afternoon of February 1, Tanaschishin's tank corps had penetrated deep into the German rear, splitting up the enemy's forces. The blow was struck accurately, like the surgeon's knife the tanks plunged into the rear of the German defences, paralysing them.

On this decisive day of fighting the corps lost a total of four tanks.

Our infantry and artillery moved into the breach in the wake of the tanks. Paying no heed to the resistance offered by the different garrisons on heights and in villages, employing the flanking manœuvre on a wide scale, our troops penetrated the German defences to a depth of forty or fifty kilometres straddling the enemy's roads of retreat. The German army at Nikopol was routed.

When I asked Colonel-General Chuikov whether the enemy had fled from any of the sectors of the fighting he smiled. "No," he replied, "they did not run because they were destroyed."

Thus ended the second encounter between the Stalingrad armies and the new German Sixth Army, the army of "vengeance." Only fourteen months had elapsed since their first encounter, only fourteen months between the battle on the Volga and the battle on the Dnieper. The outcome is profoundly significant. It provides the key to the "philosophy" of the whole war. The Sixth Army on Soviet soil failed on two strategic counts: on the offensive and the defensive.

On the Volga the Stalingrad divisions of the Red Army demonstrated the invincible might of our defences, the impotence of Field Marshal Paulus' Sixth Army. In the Nikopol area on the Dnieper the Stalingrad divisions victoriously carried the banner of our offensive strategy over the trampled remnants of Colonel-General Hollidt's Sixth Army, now on the defensive.

Our dual triumph at two phases of the war is a tribute to our way of life, to the character of our people, to everything that has its roots in the distant past, and everything associated with the splendid features of our new, bold and progressive Soviet State.

II

THE WEATHER took a decided turn for the worse. Day and night a heavy snow fell, rain poured for hours on end followed by more snow which melted before it had barely touched the earth. A mist hung over the steppes, the low clouds seemed to droop over the earth, as black, cold and heavily moist as the valleys, the hills and fields over which they hovered. Visibility was often limited to a hundred and hundred and fifty metres. All traffic stopped. Neither tank nor transporter treads, nor the wheels of powerful trucks protected by skid chains could navigate the monster swamp. Fuel rations for two hundred kilometres were used up in a single kilometre. Heavy guns stuck fast in the mud, were hauled out only to sink back into the mire again after moving a few yards.

The hopes of the routed enemy rose at the sight of the impassable swamp. The Odessa newspaper *Molva* predicted the total stoppage of our offensive. And indeed it seemed that Dame Nature intended to prevent us from reaping the fruits of success. And here again our infantryman rose to his full titanic height as the great man of the Great Patriotic War.

Where powerful motors were hopeless, the men with the rifles and tommy guns, the mortar men with their battalion mortars, and the artillerymen with their light regimental guns came to the rescue.

The offensive did not stop for a single day, for a single hour. Who can describe the great exploit accomplished by our men? Who will pen the epic work worthy of this unparalleled movement, this incessant pushing forward day and night. The infantrymen, each carrying an issue and a half of ammunition, slogged through the mire in

their sodden coats. Cruel northern winds rose and their coats froze stiff on their bodies affording no protection from the piercing wind. Great heavy blobs of mud stuck to their boots. The going was so hard that the men sometimes made less than a kilometre an hour. For tens of kilometres around there was not a dry spot where a man could rest and change his boots. The mortar men moved alongside the rifle regiments, each carrying half a dozen mines slung over his shoulder.

As they plodded painfully onward the artillerymen wondered how anyone could have called the regimental gun light! How heavy, how damnably heavy it was! Sometimes they had to give battle on sectors where even horses and oxen were unable to haul light farm carts loaded with ammunition. There were times when a few score Red Army men would form a chain and pass shells from hand to hand to the artillery positions. Dragging their guns with aching bodies through the mud the artillerymen thought longingly of furious battles.

But the passionate desire to continue the non-stop advance kept the army on the move.

"*Nitchevo*," the men would say, "it's worse for the Germans. It's the end for them."

And the pace of this offensive, unparalleled in history, was miraculously rapid. It went on day and night, smashing the German strong points, cutting off their retreat, straddling railway junctions and road intersections far behind the enemy lines. It went on simultaneously from east to west and from north to south; it developed in two synchronized thrusts that sliced up the German defences section by section, weaving a pattern of traps and semi-traps, a web of steel in which German units with their materiel and men perished.

The command which guided the complex machinery of offensive action in its most perfected and difficult form—that of flanking thrusts, pincer grips and encirclement—at a time when the spring break-up had turned the terrain into a roadless, soggy, oozing bog, shared with the fighting men all the hardships of life in this world of slush and mud under the incessant pelting of rain. Headquarter staffs were installed in jeeps towed by heavy tanks and tractors. There were days when generals plodded on foot for dozens of kilometres. Once, when his half-trac had become hopelessly mired down in the mud, Corps Commander Glazunov loaded his portable radio on the signals corps men accompanying him and himself tucking the tails of his

greatcoat under his belt just as the soldiers do, set out on foot, issuing orders to his divisions by radio as he went. Uninterrupted contact with the troops in the firing lines was the supreme law for divisional commanders and there was nothing that could be allowed to disrupt that contact.

Of invaluable service to the advancing troops were the U-2's, which served both as liaison planes carrying staff officers, orders and despatches and as transport craft flying in ammunition to the firing lines. How these industrious and modest workhorses among our aircraft managed to tear themselves loose from the sticky surface of makeshift air strips, perform their missions and come down again for the next assignment, is hard to understand even now. But all that had to be done in order to win, in order to keep the offensive going, and it was done if it meant defying all the laws of mechanics and all past experience.

The Soviet troops drove forward in country where the rivers spread out expansively in anticipation of the sea's proximity and grew into estuaries, where the sea itself cut dozens of kilometres inland, and where the lower-reach banks of streams are flat and muddy and inundated under runaway water.

And what of the engineering forces of the front, the pontoniers and the sappers and the feats they performed, the heroes and martyrs who stood up to their waists in icy mud and up to their necks in as icy water, hammering down piles with sledge-hammers and singing while they were doing so?

Who will tell the story of the countless fords and assault bridgeheads, the pontoon bridges and ferries and boats and the capital bridges across which the tanks and heavy guns rolled. All this was built and set up at fantastic speed and Colonel Tkachenko, who had held the most terrifying river crossing in history, the bridge of ice and fire that supplied the 62nd Army on the Volga, told me how rivers were crossed by the Red Army on the offensive. Everything that floated, everything that was lighter than water, was used for bridges. Fences, gates, doors, old boats, poles dropped by the Germans, ice and huge barrels that had once been filled with wine—"jolly barrels," the sappers called them—everything was made use of. No one believed it possible to build a bridge over the Dnieper before the necessary equipment had arrived, but the pontoniers believed in the Colonel and Tkachenko believed in his Stalingrad men. They built a

bridge 897 metres long in thirty-eight hours. And the artillery crossed over.

No job was ever more arduous than the building of the bridge on the southern Bug. The sappers had only a tiny strip of land on the western bank to work on and the enemy was pressing hard. So the sappers had to build the bridge amidst the bursting shells. A heavy northern gale helped the enemy. The level of the water dropped suddenly one and a half metres. The mire seemed bottomless. A test pile sank down into the doughy mess for eleven metres. But the bridge was built and in three days the Colonel sent more than ten thousand supply waggons across it. And now the Don, and the Severny Donetz, the Dnieper, the Ingulets, the Ingul, the Bug and the Dniester, the estuaries and the vast labyrinth of spring rivers, floods and streams were all behind.

It required more than the talent of a great people to overcome and outwit the elements. I am deeply convinced that it took real genius.

German propaganda is trying to blame the defeat of the army of occupation during the winter and spring of this year on "General Mud." The German general whose ill-starred report now lies before me penned the following explanation to his high command: "The Russians postponed the beginning of the offensive until the thaw... the Russians deliberately waited for the thaw... the disaster can only be blamed on the elements."

What utter stupidity! What an example of two-dimensional thinking! What proof of a total inability to perceive the truth, analyse it and draw the obvious deductions!

Had we not advanced victoriously at all seasons of the year? In the winter of 1941, in the summer and autumn of 1943, in the autumn, winter and spring of 1944?

This present foul weather has been no easier for us than for the Germans. We advanced not because of the mud but in spite of it. I know how the Military Council of the front worried about the weather, know how anxiously they studied barometres and other meteorological apparatus, know how eagerly they waited hourly for news of an improvement in the weather. The generals who supervised the operation were no less concerned about the weather than the fighting man who was ploughing his way forward through the mire. I talked to a meteorologist who delivered special lectures on the weather to the Military Council. And like all "weather men," he, poor man, was

blamed by the soldiers because he could not produce the frosty weather necessary for our offensive. Every morning meteorological reports, radio soundings and diverse other weather data lay on Army General Malinovsky's desk alongside the most important operational reports. Nature was cruel, the floods increased daily, the rivers showed no intention of freezing over, instead they rose higher still and overflowed their banks, flooding vast areas of lowlands.

In defiance of nature, the Red Army continued its victorious advance. Is that not proof of the strength, the moral stamina of the army that has been fighting in the Ukrainian steppes this winter and spring?

The indomitable spirit of our fighting man which amazed the whole world during the titanic struggle at Stalingrad has been demonstrated once more during the present offensive. Our infantrymen struck a steel wedge into the gap formed by the discrepancy between the power of the German armoured machines and the low morale of the German officers and men who were fighting for the accursed ideology of mass murder, the ideology of slavery, social and racial inequality. Our fighting men and officers showed their mettle in the face of incredible difficulties. We overcame the elements and smashed the enemy. The enemy succumbed to the elements and was routed on the battlefield. Yes, we waged our offensive under incredibly arduous conditions, we advanced in spite of the floods, in spite of the mud and not because of it. The elements are obedient not to the weak but to the strong in spirit. The weak in spirit submit to the elements. The courage, the skill, the endurance and the intelligence of our infantry, our soldiers and officers in this offensive compensated for the damage caused by the floods. We effected a complex and clever manœuvre with our armour and trucks tied up by the mud. We repulsed tank attacks by infantry because the tank destroyer artillery could not keep pace with the offensive. We learned to smash the enemy's defences with a minimum of shells for our ammunition often did not reach the firing positions on time.

The infantry learned to overcome the enemy's fire power with rifles, machine guns and battalion mortars. We had to haul supplies forward from the rear on our shoulders, to haul our artillery ourselves. The spirit of the Soviet men triumphed utterly over the tremendous difficulties, it conquered the elements and vanquished the enemy.

That is how the Red Army behaved in the face of titanic odds.

Well, and how did the soldiers, the officers and generals of the German fascist army behave? What of their spirit, how did *they* seek to cope with the difficulties?

The answer is to be found in the report and memorandum signed by Lieutenant-General Graf von Schwerin of the 16th Motorized Division, intercepted by us. The Hitlerite Command court-martialled him as one of those responsible for the catastrophe. It was on him that the blow struck by the advancing Stalingrad army fell. His justification of his conduct to Colonel-General Hollidt, the Commander-in-Chief of the army, is extremely illuminating. But before quoting from von Schwerin's report I should like to recall this:

I had encountered the 16th Motorized Division during its offensive on Stepnoye and Astrakhan at the end of the summer of 1942. I remembered it from the stories told me by the local inhabitants who spoke of von Schwerin's men as the most abominable scoundrels. They had ridden naked through the streets of Stepnoye on motorcycles, had danced in obscene fashion in the streets to the strains of mouth organs, had indulged in drunken orgies, had consumed huge quantities of meat, honey and sugar, devoured all the chickens and sheep in the area, and with drunken "philosophical" zeal had told the Russian girls that the destiny of Russia and the Russians was to become the eternal slaves of the master German race. They left a bloody trail of murdered children and aged in their wake. The school-mistress of a secondary school in Stepnoye told me how an officer of this division had attempted to rape her and how his batman had locked her in the flat with his drunken master and she had stood clutching her infant to her breast while Graf von Schwerin's officer had amused himself by holding the muzzle of his revolver to the child's head and then shooting into the floor so that the bullets sank into the woodwork right at her feet.

• But to return to Graf von Schwerin's report in the spring of 1944. He begins by speaking of our offensive.

"In the afternoon all the heights were in the hands of the enemy who was concentrated there in small numbers and was bringing up heavy armaments.

"At the same time, a report came from the corps to the effect that an enemy force of unknown strength was advancing from Yekaterinovka in the direction of Kamenka and had already broken through on the northern outskirts of Shirochany.

"In the second half of the day the enemy intensified pressure in the direction of the heights east and northeast of Mikhailovka.

"The officers were doubtful as to whether the division could hold the line but the command had announced that all measures had been taken to ensure a firm stand.

"When darkness fell the enemy commenced the offensive and penetrated to the northern outskirts of Mikhailovka, causing panic. . . .

"At 23 hours large forces of the enemy with shouts of 'Hurrah' attacked height 87.5, overcame the anti-aircraft battalion of the 9th Tank Division there and began to push them back to the west. In this way the enemy cut off the only good road to Mikhailovka. Under the circumstances alarming rumours circulated to the effect that the enemy had captured the heights northwest of Mikhailovka. Sections of the artillery regiment covering this sector abandoned their position. Mikhailovka was threatened with encirclement. I felt that I should not be reproached if I withdrew from Mikhailovka."

This is how the German lieutenant-general described the situation. Here is what he has to say about the state of his forces during our offensive.

"On the morning of February 3, Colonel Fischer came to me with the remnants of his staff. He reported that his regiment had been pushed back to the east [!] and was in most likelihood surrounded by now. At the same time I received a report from Apostolovo station that groups from the scattered division were there. They were in a state of extreme exhaustion and without ammunition or arms. A large amount of trucks were lost in the retreat from Mikhailovka. The infantry was obliged to abandon its guns to speed up movement. Ammunition and heavy armaments were lost. Many of the men were so weary that they dropped on the roadside from exhaustion. This situation completely disorganized and demoralized the men. The units of the 123rd and the 306th Infantry Divisions which were in Mikhailovka are missing. It is not known whether they retreated during the night toward the northeast or whether they were totally smashed.

"The 306th Field Reserve Battalion is only partly fit for action. It has been replenished by men from the rear guard units, it lacks unity and its officers are not reliable.

"The remnants of the second and third battalions of the 60th Motorized Regiment are exhausted. There is a shortage of arms, a total lack of machine guns, and very few heavy guns. . . .

"The remnants of the 45th Infantry Regiment are so physically and morally exhausted that they are barely fit for action. There are no arms, ammunition, commanding personnel and quartermaster service. . . ."

No Soviet citizen, fighting man, officer, workman or intellectual can fail to read these confessions without experiencing a feeling of justifiable pride and profound satisfaction.

Graf von Schwerin ends with a general summary of his armoured forces.

"Trucks and tractors were stuck helplessly in the mud, the soldiers stood by unable to do anything to save their weapons, equipment, ammunition or personal belongings. These men roam about knee-deep in mud, without plan or leadership, their position is critical, and they are sowing panic and fear everywhere. Contact between headquarters and troops is disrupted and confusion reigns, for without communication the entire apparatus of control goes out of commission. All this amounts to paralysing the soldier's limbs and gagging him—this is the mental condition of everyone whether officer or soldier."

The next statement is truly staggering in its profundity:

"My units must have good solid roads, when the roads are bad it is impossible for them to move." This testimony of a defeated enemy is objective enough.

The clash of arms that took place on the fields and plains of the Ukraine demonstrated the lofty morale of the Red Army and the impotence of the German fascist troops. Malicious Nature as hostile to us as to the enemy, was vanquished by the spiritual stamina of the Soviet fighting men. Floods and mud did not prevent just vengeance from being meted out to the bandit hordes that had invaded our land. In their defensive strategy the Germans revealed the defectiveness and inadequacy of their fighting spirit and military thought. As was the case in the Stalingrad offensive, they failed because of the discrepancy between the mechanical power of the German army and the low morale of its officers and men and their inability to cope with conditions unforeseen in the service regulations.

They were incapable of defensive action even approximating the magnificent showing of our troops at Stalingrad. The hand grenade, this formidable weapon in defensive close-range fighting, which in modern warfare is what the bayonet was in Suvorov's day, was too much for them.

In one respect only did they remain true to themselves to the last. The entire path of their retreat is strewn with the corpses of thousands of defenceless women, children and old people they murdered. When compelled to abandon their materiel in villages grown untenable they drove their black odious fighting machines against the walls of the white Ukrainian cottages and set fire to the gasolene tanks. There they stand, fire-gutted skeletons beside the ash heaps that were once peasant homes. This is a symbol of German fascism: like an expiring reptile that sinks its poison fangs into living, innocent flesh.

The call of the leader of the Red Army, Comrade Stalin, to "destroy to the last man the German forces of occupation who have intruded into our country for the purpose of enslaving it," is being realized. The Red Army is emerging at the state frontiers of the Soviet Union all along the front. In dozens of giant traps and pockets it is grinding to pulp the once mighty Wehrmacht.

The Red Army is tracking to their lair all those who dared to cross our frontier and sought to evade retribution. The war is entering a new, decisive stage.

April 23
Third Ukrainian Front

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL Meshcheryakov had his Headquarters in a cottage perched on a hill at the edge of the village.

"Quite a health resort," joked the liaison and staff officers as they drove up to the cottage which nestled in the shadow of a spreading tree.

From the window through field glasses you could see the line of hills where the Germans had their defences. During the day the clear deep waters of the river glistened brightly and gaily in the sunshine. By night the stars peeped through the rich dark foliage and the moon turned the river to silver.

Vines grew on the southern slopes of the hill, in the valley corn rose thickly whispering with its silky pointed tassels. Inside the cottages it was cool even at noon. The shining whitewashed walls acquired a bluish tint on moonlit nights.

At dusk the General would go for a stroll under the low-hanging boughs. He walked slowly, cap in hand, and the sentries often lost sight of him in the deep shadow of the trees. Peering into the darkness they would catch a sudden glimpse of his grey head silhouetted in the moonlight, as he stood on the hill looking over the river to where the Germans were.

And so long as he stood there the sentries were silent; they neither sang nor puffed on cigarettes hidden hastily in their cuff, nor called softly to one another. But no sooner had the Commander returned to the cottage, than a cigarette would glow again in the dark as the tommy-gunner on sentry duty outside the Chief of Staff's cottage lit up, and Pankratov, the broad-shouldered middle-aged soldier who guarded the commanding officer's cottage would break into a low whistle, and Kafy, the Tatar nicknamed Kolka by his buddies, would begin to cough.

In the afternoon the divisional commanders gathered at the General's Headquarters. There were knotty problems to be solved. Studying the map, the Colonels and Generals listened to the Commander-in-Chief intently. The infantry, tanks, artillery, engineering battalions, fighter and bomber aircraft in co-ordinated action were to crush the German defences, decimate the German divisions, fight the enemy on his own territory.

The Commander-in-Chief outlined the plan of action. The unit commanders reported on the conditions of their respective forces, and made suggestions regarding the enemy's positions on this sector. They spoke of feints, of the direction of the main thrust, of ammunition, of wireless and other communications, of co-ordinating artillery and tanks, aircraft and infantry, of mine fields, bridges, smoke screens on river crossings, of food supplies, of the multiplex problem of co-ordination in depth behind the enemy's defences.

The Commander-in-Chief listened attentively. The men who had victoriously led their regiments and divisions up to the borders of their native land had dozens of difficult battles behind them, they knew their opponent well and could judge accurately of his strong and weak points. They knew their own men, their character, their inclinations, their hobbies, their experience and ability. They had been schooled in a war of unparalleled ferocity. They had shown their mettle in the face of overwhelming odds. They had demonstrated that in this war their academic learning was not sufficient, and they had enriched this learning with their inspiration, their talent, their courage and their intellect. They had shown that to lead regiments and divisions into battle is not only a science but an art in the highest, most inspired sense of the word. They had shown in this war all their profound respect for tradition and their contempt for routine and the stereotyped. They had not shrunk from mean tasks, had not evaded hardships, dangers and cold, they were sons of their people.

Leaning on his elbow on the table, the Commander-in-Chief listened carefully to the curt, business-like reports of his commanders.

The conference was over.

It was time to leave but both Meshcheryakov and the unit commanders seemed loath to part. There was something solemn and stirring about this conference on the frontiers of the liberated land, on the war's new Rubicon.

"And so we have crossed the frontier," Meshcheryakov said at last. "Last night I looked down from this hill and got to thinking. I remembered a man who had been here in these parts during the war of 1914...."

He laughed and added:

"Semyon Markovich Meshcheryakov, son of a peasant, private of the 1st platoon, second company."

"Why, Semyon Markovich," said the Artillery Commander, a stocky, large-headed General with bristly grey hair over a wrinkled forehead, the author of a famous textbook and head of a chair in the Military Academy before the war, "why, Semyon Markovich," he said, "you and I were practically neighbours then! In 1915 I served as a gunner in the mountain artillery about one hundred and twenty kilometres southwest of this place."

"Hotchkiss guns," chuckled the Liaison Chief, a burly Colonel wearing glasses. "Hotchkiss guns. Don't I know them! I worked as a draughtsman in the artillery repair shops on the southwestern front in those days.... I was a second year student in the polytechnical school when I volunteered."

"That leaves us out of it," remarked a curly-headed General famed throughout the world for the smashing blow he had dealt the Germans at Stalingrad, "I was a lad of thirteen then working as an apprentice in a saddlers' shop in Petrograd."

And a young, dapper commander of the Guards Division wearing the Gold Star of the Hero of the Soviet Union added gaily:

"I was here in 1941. Commander of a battalion with the rank of Major. And as for the prehistoric times the Commander-in-Chief mentioned I was still a little punker running messages for my big brother Kolka who had reached the status of shepherd's helper."

Everyone laughed.

An adjutant entered and walking over to the General bent over and whispered something in his ear.

The General nodded.

"Good," he said. "Dinner's ready. I expect you all to do me the pleasure of joining me, comrades. The table is laid under the trees and the air is pleasantly fresh."

The fat Colonel remarked *sotto voce* to his neighbour:

"Fresh air is all right but a little wine would be still better."

The Commander-in-Chief overheard the remark and turned to the Colonel.

"Right you are, Comrade Colonel!" he said. "Splendid grape wine, straight from the cellar. Surely you did not doubt me?"

The Colonel reddened with embarrassment and one could see that he was already anticipating the jokes that would be cracked at his expense by his comrades after this incident.

Three weeks earlier in this same village, at this very same table under this same spreading tree in whose shade the Soviet Commander-in-Chief was playing host to the commanders of his divisions had sat a German corps commander Lieutenant-General Graf von Erlenkampf.

He was to move that night to a new command post. His batmen, supervised by his adjutant, were packing his valises, the soldier who had been his driver since the beginning of the war, was pouring gasolene into the spare tanks that were fastened with thick straps and bits of wire to the polished sides of the large Opel Admiral.

Erlenkampf sat at the table in his raincoat. Colonel Klaus, his chief of staff, stood beside him.

"Sit down, Klaus," said Erlenkampf, "have some cognac." He filled the glasses, laughed drily and said:

"Well, here's hoping we get across the Russian frontier safely, both of us, of course."

"The Russian campaign is not over," said Klaus.

"It is too soon for either of us to drink to the favourable end of the Russian campaign, of course," said the corps commander.

Erlenkampf was unusually talkative. He drank down his cognac, poured himself out another glass and downed that as well.

"Pleasant thoughts come to my mind," he said, "remarkably pleasant. I gave a dinner for my officers somewhere in this neighbourhood on June the twenty-first, nineteen forty-one. It was a great day, we said. And we believed it. And here I am again sitting under this tree with Russia east of me once more. Incidentally, whoever invented those words: Eastern *Lebensraum*? Nothing has changed, Klaus, eh? Rubbish! Then we were a force, now.... But you know the situation as well as I do. Where are the divisional commanders with whom I drank to success in 1941? Krause was killed by the partisans, Fischer fell at Belgorod, von Rostocki was taken prisoner on the Don. And all the others? And what about the indispensable Büchner? And Haus, the iron colonel? And Schüller, your predecessor? They are all gone. And where are the grenadiers and those who replaced them twice over? Yesterday I asked for some figures and found that less than two percent of the entire personnel of the corps are veterans. Think of it, less than two percent! The rest are either underground, taken prisoners or discharged from the army as cripples. Klaus, this is not *Lebensraum*. It is *Todesraum*, that's it! And you and I have escaped it all unscathed. We are not lying underground, we

have not been put on trial as so many others, nor have we been demoted like Graf Schwerin. So don't you think we have something to drink to, eh? We can drink to the unforgettable things we have witnessed during the Russian campaign, we can drink to Field Marshal Paulus, to Field Marshal Manstein, remember when we last saw him trudging through the mud when his car broke down, his hands and face smeared with mud. We can drink to Hollidt who is on the run, to Brauchitsch's downfall, to that terrible battlefield at Kastornaya where you couldn't see this accursed earth for the corpses of our soldiers; we can drink to those who went insane after the Russian artillery attacks, for the officers and men floundering in the mud, for the great tank armies that were lost down to the last machine. We have plenty to drink to, don't you agree, Klaus?"

Never had the chief of staff seen the General in such a state.

"One could scarcely call you an optimist today," he ventured.

"There is only one thing I never could and still cannot understand," Erlenkampf went on, unheeding, "we have been losing all the time and now, today as we cross the frontier again I can say that we have lost everything it is possible to lose—our strategic plans, our confidence, our materiel, and what is most important, we have lost our knowledge, our experience in this mania of traps and encirclements. After fighting in Russia for three years we have become less skilled, less brave and less intelligent than we were before. The officer of 1942 is worse in every way than the officer of 1941, and the officer of 1944 is a paler, more dull-witted edition of the officer of 1943. From first-rate officers we have degenerated to fourth-rate. All this is understandable. But why is it that with the Russians the exact opposite is true? Why do they have so many capable men? Do they grow out of the earth? Where do they get these thousands upon thousands of competent officers? Where do they come from? Why has the war petrified the brain of the German army? Why has the war given the Russians such a rich crop of talented people? Where do they come from? Answer me that, Klaus?"

"I do not know," Klaus replied.

Erlenkampf glanced at him and said with his customary composure:

"Let us forget this conversation, Klaus. Perhaps you can understand what it means for a man whose great-grandfather was a German general to have to cross the Russian frontier as I have crossed it today."

The owner of the cottage in which the tommy-gunners, detailed to guard the Military Council, were billeted was a very old man. Even his son was old. At least so the tommy-gunners and the Commander-in-Chief's driver thought. They referred to them as "the old granpa," and "the young granpa."

Pankratov, who guarded the Commander-in-Chief's cottage, was especially fond of drawing the old chaps into conversation. Chairman of a collective farm before the war, Pankratov took a keen intelligent interest in everything that went on around him and had a passion for figuring things out. He liked to talk and to listen.

The owner of the house spoke Russian quite well. He had lived near Benderi and had served on the estate of a Russian landowner.

"The Russians fought here in 1916," he said. "There were Russian soldiers billeted in my house then too."

"So," said Pankratov interested. "And what do you think of the Russian soldiers now?"

"They're quite different," replied the old man. "In those days only one soldier knew how to read and write and all the others used to come to him and ask him to read or write letters for them. And now I see every man writes and reads his own letters, reads newspapers and books, studies maps and writes in notebooks."

"That's so," agreed Pankratov. "And what about yourself? You're literate, aren't you?"

"Me? No. I'm just a plain muzhik, always was and always will be. And my son's the same. We're just muzhiks."

"My son is the manager of the district department of finance. The chief of all the bookkeepers and accountants in the district."

The old man laughed.

"I see you don't believe me," said Pankratov, "but I'm not the only one. Take my collective farm. Do you know how many of our folks are getting book learning? There's Syomka Pronin, he's a professor now. Anyutka and Vera Mironova are doctors. Luba Stepanova's another, she came home on leave in 1941 with two bars on her uniform. Then there's the Byelov brothers, both engineers. And Pavel, grandson to the farm's stableman, he's an engineer too, a production manager, mind you. Six of our villagers are school-teachers in town. Vitka Kozin went to Moscow to write for the newspapers. And as for mechanics and tractor drivers, I couldn't count them all. There are two colonels in the Red Army from our collective farm, if you'd like

to know. You think I'm making all this up? Nay, grandpa, have you ever tried to figure out how it was that we got the upper hand over the Germans?"

And he began to count on his fingers:

"The Germans, one, the Italians, two, then the Finns, Hungarians, and Rumanians, that's how many? I read in the papers that they got a division of ragamuffins together in Spain too. And all that against our one country. There was never anything like it before. All the evil in the world arrayed against us. No one could have stood it. Can you picture what would have happened in nineteen fourteen, eh? Here's the way I see it. Our country is strong because after the revolution our people took things into their own hands. And if a muzhik works himself up to the rank of a general you may rest assured he'll be the best general that ever wore uniform. That was something that dope Hitler didn't count on. He thought everything in our country was the way it had always been, the muzhik weaving bast shoes and the worker getting drunk in saloons."

He talked so fast that the old man did not understand half of what he said.

Pankratov was about to tell him that the Commander-in-Chief himself had been an ordinary soldier once but, thinking that that might be a military secret, he refrained.

Just then the Sergeant-Major came in.

"Hey, Pankratov," he said sternly, "you'd better stop gabbing and report for duty or you'll be late."

And in the evening the General stood on the hill and looked down at the river and over to the hills beyond where the Germans were. And the sentries caught glimpses of his grey head in the moonlight. What was he thinking of?

There were no more Russian and Ukrainian lands groaning under the German heel to the west. Over there lay enemy soil. To the east rolled the great tracts of land and the dozens of rivers the army had traversed on its way from the Volga.

And the rivers whose banks had echoed to the thunder of guns and the explosion of grenades flowed calmly on bearing away on their bosom the mournful songs of the fishermen in torn calico shirts who had cast their nets into their depths, bearing away the nocturnal whispering of scouts and the salty blood of the men who had fought on these rivers for the freedom of Russia and the Ukraine, Moldavia and

Byelorussia. The rivers flowed on to the sea, and the tears, the blood and the hopes of the people mingled with the brine. That is why the waves have such a bitter, salty taste.

The power of the seething ocean wave is great because its waters flow from the rivers of a country that has given its all in this bloody war, from a country inhabited by people who have brought to the struggle their titanic strength, their great hearts, and brain, the talents of working men freed by the revolution.

Third Ukrainian Front

THE BOBRUISK POCKET

I

THE DAY and hour of the offensive were veiled in the utmost secrecy. But, of course, millions of people—the whole Red Army, the entire Soviet nation—knew that the offensive was coming, and expected it hourly. The enemy, too, were nervously awaiting our offensive. They were preparing for it as they listened feverishly to the sly, tantalizing fire of our big guns that provoked answering fire from the German batteries concealed in forests, glades and fields of tall green rye.

Yes, the Germans were waiting and preparing for our offensive.

When the hour struck, the divisions under Field Marshal von Busch that were concentrated against the one army of Marshal Rokossovsky were no less in number than the divisions gathered under Rundstedt to fight off the invasion of France by British and American troops. But von Busch's divisions were better trained and more experienced than the German armies in Europe. These picked troops were the ones assigned to repulse the attack of our army on the First Byelorussian Front. Shortly before our offensive, von Busch made a personal tour of his divisions and regiments appealing to the soldiers to stand firm. Written promises were extracted from the men to the effect that they would die sooner than retreat a single step. They were told that all who retreated would be shot, and that their families back home in Germany would suffer merciless reprisals.

The German defences on the Drut River were several kilometres in depth. Six lines of trenches, mine fields, barbed-wire entanglements, artillery of all calibre—everything was prepared to beat off our attack. The Germans were waiting. An officer we took prisoner just a few days before the offensive told us that the sole topic of conversation among the German commanders was the impending drive of the Soviet forces. There was whispered talk of a tremendous Byelorussian pocket, and all sorts of surmises as to the direction in which our blows would be struck. Furloughs were cancelled. New developments appeared in the defences. Thus, in addition to the powerful heavily-roofed blindages, the Germans prepared for our artillery fire by putting up corrugated metal cupolas in their trenches. A metal bell of this kind, buried in sand, will hold out against a shell of medium calibre and provide shelter for a machine gun and

gunner until a barrage is over. Then, as soon as the artillery falls silent, the gunner comes to the surface through a convenient exit and opens fire. In some of the trenches there were such machine-gun shelters at every ten to fifteen metres.

Foreseeing that many of their batteries would be spotted by our artillery scouts, the Germans set up extra, "silent," batteries of guns and mortars, whose presence was not betrayed in any way during a lull. These were especially designed to conduct fire against our infantry when it came over the top.

What, then, was the secret about the offensive if everyone, enemies as well as friends, expected it?

The secret was that the Germans did not know the day and the hour, did not know the direction of our main and auxiliary drives.

The success of the German offensive in June 1941 was due in very considerable degree to its suddenness, its arrant perfidy. The failure of the German offensive in July 1943 was due in some degree to the fact that we knew about this offensive, that we were ready and waiting for it. Our reconnaissance had discovered not only the day, but even the hour for which it was set. The Germans did not succeed in catching us unawares. Deprived of the element of surprise, the German offensive became a German retreat. The battle they began for Kursk was ended on the Dnieper. In this battle they lost the Ukraine. And just three years after the outbreak of the war, the thunder of the artillery barrage rolling down three fronts from north to south proclaimed to the world that the fight for Byelorussia was on.

Face to face with the foe the Germans were defeated; we demonstrated our superiority: a superiority in arms, superiority in morale and superiority in ability.

II

General Gorbatov's troops began their artillery preparation at 4 a.m. A cold, gusty wind was blowing. The air, the houses in the abandoned village, the trees, the ground, and the clouds that hung too low for summer were all grey. In this hour before dawn, the whole world looked like a dreary sketch in watery ink. The birds were clamouring in the trees, as though to hasten the appearance of the sun. The grey, sunless light distressed and alarmed them. That morning there were two dawns. The sky was lit up in the west by

an unbroken line of fitful, insistent fire that rivalled the blaze of the sun as it rose in the east. The sacred fire of the Patriotic War!

The pounding hammer blows of the Headquarters' artillery, the thunder of the divisional guns, the booming of the howitzers, the sharp, rapid reports of the regimental guns merged in an uproar that shook the very foundations of the earth.

Through the rumble of the artillery came a piercing whistle that sounded as though an enormous locomotive were letting out steam. Hundreds of fiery sickles rose into the air and descended point downwards into the German trenches. The Guards' trench mortars had opened fire.... A cat ran down the deserted village street, dragging its tail in the dust. It must have been meowing desperately, but its cry could not be heard.

The leaves of the Byelorussian maples, oaks and poplars trembled. In the deserted houses windowpanes shattered, brick stoves crumbled to the floor, and doors and shutters swung to and fro wildly.

To a stranger approaching a metal works the din of organized human labour sounds utterly chaotic, like the roar of the sea. To the uninitiated, the thunder of our cannon that day might also have sounded like the storming of the elements in chaos. But this was the din of the labour of war, a labour no less vast, intricate and ingenious than the labour of the thousands of engineers, forgemen, foundrymen, draughtsmen and rolling-mill operators in a metal works. Hundreds and thousands of hours of painstaking, intensive labour had preceded this stormy festival of artillery fire. Each of these hundreds of guns was firing at a target previously spotted and calculated.

The hurricane of artillery fire had been preceded by tremendous labour on the part of scouts, regimental and divisional commanders, flyers, topographers and staff officers. It was this intelligent and painstaking labour that now directed our barrage so that every gun was turned against an enemy cannon or machine gun. And still, the enemy's fire was not entirely crushed by our preliminary barrage. Several times our infantry rose to the attack, only to be met by the fire of German machine guns and mortars. The Germans realized perfectly the importance of this line of their defences. They fought for it with fierce tenacity, with the fury of despair, with the madness of suicides. They came crawling out of their corrugated metal shelters and set up their machine guns in the half-wrecked trenches; their "silent" cannon and machine guns began to speak.

In this face to face encounter the Germans strained their every nerve and reached the very peak of their defensive powers. In this battle no allowances were made for "elasticity," the force of the former commander of the 9th Army, General Model—"Elastic Model."

It was no easy task for the Red Army divisions, advancing through the swampy lowlands of the Drut valley against the heights that were occupied by the Germans, against the row on row of trenches stretching back for kilometres.... Towards noon, our planes went up. Never before had I seen so many aircraft. The vast expanses of the heavens suddenly became as crowded as the Red Square during May Day celebrations. The sky was in tumult with the even roar of the dive bombers, the hard, metallic voices of the attack planes, the piercing whine of the "Yakovlev" and "Lavochkin" fighters. Fields and meadows were dotted with the slow shadows of the clouds and the darting outlines of hundreds of planes, flying between earth and sun. A great black wall rose beyond the line of the front. The smoke looked as black and heavy as earth, while the torn earth rose into the sky as lightly as smoke. Now a new sound joined the orchestra of battle. A tank corps, secretly concentrated in the forest, was crawling to a new position, in readiness to throw the whole weight of its steel into the breach in the enemy defences. The tanks were camouflaged with fresh branches and saplings of birch and aspen, with millions of green, quivering young leaves. Youthful faces peered through the hatches.

In speaking of an expected offensive, the men at the front often say, "We'll be having a wedding soon," or, "There's a gala day coming." And as I watched the steel bedecked with green, I involuntarily thought: the gala day has come, all right, the grim, audacious gala day of war.

There were moments when the booming of the artillery, the droning of the planes and the roaring of the tanks merged in one great sound that shook both heaven and earth. It seemed as if the Urals, planned objective of the invaders, had arisen and were striding to the west, making the earth sag and rending the sky. At such moments, more than anything else I longed for a miracle that could bring to this spot, in this hour of rejoicing the thousands upon thousands of splendid, modest toilers, of workers and engineers, whose unwearying labour and skilful, devoted hands had created these guns, tanks, and planes for the Red Army. They were not there.

They could not have been there. But I want them to know that time and again, in these terrible and bloody days, I heard from generals, officers and rank-and-file Red Army men expressions of the highest gratitude and love for the working people whose labour prevented the loss of much young blood, the blood of the men who pushed ahead.

III

THE SAYING goes that the infantry is queen of the field. These days, the infantry was queen not only in the field, but in forest, swamp, and stream. All other arms of the service work for the infantry, and the infantry works for them all. Great is the power of motors, of armour, of fire, of machinery. Gun fights gun, and shell splinters tear barbed wire. The sappers clear passages through mine fields. It is a fearful job, crawling forward, thirty to fifty metres from the enemy trenches during our artillery preparation to take the sting out of the mines and cut through wire entanglements. Here we met our old friends from Stalingrad, Major Ryvkin's sappers, from Major-General Gurtiev's division. Lanky Sergeant-Major Efim Efimovich Dudnikov crawls right up to the breastworks of the German trenches, just as he did at the Barricades Plant in Stalingrad: clippers and mine detector in hand, grenades in their tarpaulin bag, at his belt the revolver which belonged to Stalingrad's finest sapper, Bryssin, who fell in action a few months ago. This revolver was presented to Dudnikov by the divisional command. The passages through the mine fields at this sector were cleared so efficiently that the division did not lose a single man on enemy mines during the whole operation of breaching the enemy defences,

All through the assault our infantry was accompanied by regimental artillery, self-propelled cannon, and tank units. After thirty hours the frantic, tenacious resistance of the Germans was broken. By noon of the second day our troops had captured all six lines of the German trenches. Our tanks have strong armour and powerful motors; our artillery fire is crushing. The strength of our motors and the power of our fire assisted the infantry. And the infantry, the demiurge of war, striding in khaki tunic across the iron fields of battle, amply repaid the assistance it had received in breaking through the enemy defences. It did not remain in debt to the artillery, or the tanks, or the sappers.

Once they had broken through, our infantry regiments made no

distinction between day and night. Pushing ahead without sleep or rest, they gave the enemy no chance to make a stand on any new line of defence, neither on the Dogbysna, nor on the Ola, nor on the Vir. The infantry pointed out Ferdinands hidden in the brush to our self-propelled cannon. The sappers had no more bridges to build, no more roads to clear of mines. The infantry advanced so rapidly that the Germans did not have time to lay mines or to blow up bridges. A ton and a half of explosives, planted by the Germans, was found under one big bridge. Hundreds of bridges, great and small, remained undamaged. The road was open for the tanks. The infantry advanced through fields, through swamps waist-deep in mud, through murky woods and prickly underbrush, appearing where the Germans least expected it. It paid its debt to the artillery and tanks in full measure. The operation had been planned by the Staff to take nine days. General Gorbatov had undertaken to carry it through in seven. The man with the rifle slung over his weatherstained khaki tunic enabled our command to realize its project in three days.

What was the essence of this project?

The idea, like all big, worth-while ideas, was simple. After the German defences had been breached, the main drive was to be made in a direction where the Germans would not be expecting it. On entering the breach, the tanks were to head perpendicularly towards the Berezina. But at a certain point they were to change their direction abruptly, coming out in the rear of the Germans north of Bobruisk. Here they were to halt and cut off the road to retreat, transforming the field of battle into a steel anvil, on which we would have five divisions of enemy infantry and one of tanks. Our advancing infantry and artillery were to descend on this anvil like a mighty, merciless hammer. The success of the operation would mean a frightful pocket, a fatal encirclement for the Germans.

The concentration of our tanks and artillery in the direction chosen for the main drive was conducted with the utmost secrecy. Huge masses of war machinery were transferred in the course of several weeks, moving only in the dead of night. Fifty experienced officers were in charge of transferring the materiel. Long before dawn, the tank and artillery regiments would vanish without trace in the forests along the bank of the Drut. Day after day the German scouts would report: "Movement along the roads as usual."

And suddenly, at noon on the third day of the offensive, Bakha-

rev's tanks entered the breach. They raced down the roads which our infantry had prevented the Germans from mining, and across the bridges which our infantry had prevented the Germans from destroying. Within a few hours the movement of the tanks was over. The German grouping retreating west of the Drut under pressure of our infantry division was cut off at the eastern bank of the Berezina. This section of the 9th German fascist army did not succeed in breaking through to the river, as Napoleon's army had once broken through. The Germans were overtaken by their fate on the eastern bank of the river, and not at the crossing. From this day forth through the ages the river Berezina will strike horror to the hearts of all who contemplate invading Russia. Berezina—1944 has taken its place beside Berezina—1812.

IV

I HAD the good fortune to see how the Bobruisk "pocket" was sewn up, and how our units within the pocket, if I may so express myself, used a pocketknife and ladle. The knife severed communication and co-ordination between the German army corps and the divisions, between the divisions and the regiments, between the regiments and the battalions and companies. The knife destroyed all who refused to lay down their arms. The ladle lavishly scooped up prisoners. The knife and ladle were wielded swiftly, skilfully, indefatigably.

General Urbanovich was sitting in a German soldiers' dugout on the outskirts of a pine forest. The straw on the banks still bore the imprint of the Germans who had been lying there only a few hours previously. The earthen floor was littered with magazines and fat German novels. The telephone operator kept repeating persistently:

"Mignonette. Listen here, Mignonette. Mignonette. Mignonette. Poppy speaking. Poppy speaking!"

Jeeps, tearing along as though they were driving down an asphalt highway, wound their way between the pine trunks, and stopped at the entrance to the dugout. Artillery, infantry and liaison officers, sweating with the heat and the excitement, reported on the situation to their General. The air throbbed to the thunder of our guns and the blasts of German shells. Urbanovich—a tall, thin man just beginning to go bald—sat over a map spread out on a rough pine table. Every now and then he paused to wipe the lenses of his pince-nez, and then bent over the map again, tracing the direction with

his pencil as he gave orders to the officers around him. He distributed his tanks, self-propelled guns, rifle battalions, and artillery batteries along the roads and bridges, at every spot where the Germans might possibly attempt to break out of encirclement. His calm movements and academically deliberate speech were in striking contrast to the excitement of the people around him. Fearing that the feverish strain of these hours might affect the precise execution of his orders and that the pocket might burst a seam, he would ask:

"Is that clear to you? Write it down. Now repeat it. Repeat it again. Correct. You may go."

One after another, the roads to retreat were cut off. The pocket was sewn up more and more tightly. By evening of June 27 the Germans finally grasped the extent of their catastrophe.

In the first few hours, before they had entirely lost control of the army corps and divisions, the Germans collected a driving force of tanks and artillery and made several attempts to break through to the northwest. At 3 a.m. on June 26 they attempted to attack. These attempts cost them a terrible price in blood. And they were all in vain. Then the German Command instructed its troops to break out of encirclement in separate detachments, resorting to tactics of deceit and perfidy. Raising one hand in the air and holding their weapons in the other, the fascists would approach, proclaiming surrender; but as soon as they got near enough, they would attack. Several of our men who went out for parley were killed. For this treachery, too, the Germans paid a terrible price in blood. June 1944 was not June 1941. The Byelorussian forests were a fearful sight. There were places in these forests where one could not see the ground for the bodies of the fascist dead.

Now came the third, culminating period of cleaning up the pocket. The Germans lost their artillery. Thousands of big, well-fed artillery horses wandered about among the pines and in the green rye fields. Stacks of shells stood forsaken under the trees. Abandoned guns stared east, west, north and south, for in their last hours the German artillerymen had been expecting attack from all quarters.

The German corps, divisions, regiments, and companies fell to pieces. German lieutenant-generals held conferences under the tall pines, and our scouts watching through the bushes heard them plead with small groups of soldiers to put off surrender. Divisional commanders, abandoned by their orderlies and deprived of cooks and

kitchens, picked wild strawberries in the forest clearings. Regimental commanders hid in the rustling rye, watching our tanks pass by on the road. Hauptmanns and Oberleutnants dug lairs for themselves under trees, their medals tinkling as they worked.

Soon our ladle began to operate. The dust rose to the very sky as thousands of German boots went marching to the east. Yellow pillars of dust moved down scores of Byelorussian roads, raised by the columns of German prisoners, men and officers. Their faces were black with dirt, their uniforms tattered and torn. Heads hung low. Eyes were fixed on the ground.

We saw many a rare bird in those hours when our ladle was scooping up the Germans out of the Bobruisk pocket.... There was a regimental commander with seven crosses—a murderer with the sky-blue eyes and rosy lips of an innocent girl, and a wallet full of appalling photographs. One photograph was of a partisan, hanging in a noose, a woman embracing his dead feet.

"Oh, that was in Poland," said the German, as though banditry in Poland were not liable to punishment.

"But," we protested, "what about the inscription on the signboard near the partisan's body. It says, 'How we punish partisans'—in Russian!"

"Oh," replied the murderer, "that doesn't mean a thing. It was on the border between Russia and Poland."

We talked to fear-crazed Hauptmanns and Oberleutnants, who had just emerged from the rye with their hands in the air. Even before they put their hands down, they would declare on the spot that Germany was invincible. When asked about the fate of their battalions, which were already raising the dust on their way to the east, they would shrug their shoulders with infinite indifference; but their voices trembled with emotion as they begged us to return their penknives, razors, mother-of-pearl nailfiles and other such trifles. Out of the depths of the pocket we scooped up the wildest freaks, types not to be found among the Germans taken prisoner at the forward position. There were quartermasters, pastors, members of punitive detachments. There was a famous fat-faced chef, with a diploma, whose art had served to regale the stomach of a lieutenant-general who commanded a division. There was a captain, positively massive in size, with such broad shoulders I doubt whether he could have walked straight through an open gate, and a skull the size of

a new-born infant's. He was in command of the supply trains in the rear. We combed the Germans out of the woods, the glades, the gullies, the rye, the swamps—individually, in scores, in hundreds, in great mobs. Towards the end, prisoners were brought in not only by our tommy-gunners, riflemen and tank crews, but even by "volunteers"—the operator of our walkie-talkie, the barber from Divisional Headquarters, and even the girls who worked in the Divisional Political Department.

It took one hundred hours of our offensive to reduce picked German divisions, which had been fighting on the eastern front for three years, to a state of utter helplessness and stupefaction. It took one hundred hours to transform this furiously resisting grouping of German fascist troops, well organized, deeply entrenched, and armed with powerful artillery and tanks, into a huge mob plodding through yellow clouds of dust under escort of a few score tommy-gunners.

V

THREE DAYS later we returned to General Gorbatov's Headquarters and met once more the men with whom, in the cold grey light of dawn, we had followed the artillery preparation; the men with whom we had watched the mighty advance of our aviation and heard the rumble of Bakharev's tanks as they concentrated to enter the breach. Could it be that only three days had passed since that hour when our infantry set forth across the deadly lowlands of the Drut to attack the German trenches?

General Ivashechkin, Chief of Staff, and Gorbatov's second in command, still sat sleepless at his table, his big, curly head bent over a map.

General Gorbatov, a tall man with greying hair, congratulated the men and called upon them to fight the enemy with even greater punch after their glorious victory at Bobruisk. Gorbatov's assistants know his iron rule: to spare no fascist blood in battle, but to safeguard the blood of our own men and commanders as our greatest treasure.

The troops are moving forward. It is a long road that lies before them, and great glory that awaits them. Good luck to you, comrades!

July 28
First Byelorussian Front

GOOD IS STRONGER THAN EVIL

I

HOW OFTEN it happens, on the winding roads of the front, during a brief halt, or in a passing encounter in the forest, or in momentary conversation at some village well to the accompaniment of the creaking sun-dried windlass—how often it happens that you suddenly catch a glimpse of the great miracle of the human soul. Sometimes you hear a gracious word of wisdom from a soldier, or from a gruff village oldster, or from a sly, but simple-hearted granny. Sometimes you see things that bring unbidden tears to your eyes; and sometimes you are amused so heartily that the memory makes you laugh aloud days later. How much poetry and beauty there are in such passing scenes, in these glimpses caught in woodland glades, in the tall rye, under the coppery trunks of pines, on the sandy banks of a river in the clear hour of dawn, in the dust and smoke of some gorgeous, flaming sunset, or under the light of the moon. And sometimes how harrowing are the sights, freezing your blood, fleeting scenes of horror that you know you will never forget to your dying day and that will always weigh on your heart.

But it is the strangest thing: When you sit down to write, somehow you cannot get it down on paper. You start writing about a tank corps, about heavy artillery, about a breakthrough in the enemy defences, and suddenly you hear some old woman talking with a soldier; or you see a trembling young foal in an empty field standing steadily beside the dead body of its mother; or you see bees beginning to swarm on a branch of a young apple tree in a burning village, and a barefoot old Byelorussian climbing out of the ditch where he has been taking cover from the shells and removing the cluster, while the soldiers watch him with unutterable eloquence in their thoughtful, melancholy eyes.

In these trifles the soul of the people is reflected. In these trifles are reflected the whole essence of our war, its sufferings, its victories, its stern and pain-bought glory.

The natural scene in Byelorussia is both like and unlike nature in the Ukraine; the faces of the Byelorussian and Ukrainian peasants, too, are both like and unlike. The Byelorussian landscape is a melancholy water-colour, done in chary, gentle tones. In the Ukraine we also find such swamps and rivulets, such orchards, forests, glades and

red-brown sands, such clayey, sandy dust on the roads. But Nature in the Ukraine is not stamped with such monotonous melancholy. We do not find such pensive faces in the Ukraine, such grey-and-white uniformity in attire. The soil of Byelorussia is more stingy, more swampy. It has granted Nature less colour, less fertility and wealth; it has given man less vivid tints in complexion and attire.

But as you watch the throngs of Byelorussian partisans coming out of the woods, with their hand grenades and German tommy guns, and the cartridge belts wound around their waists, you realize how richly gifted are the Byelorussian people in their undying love of liberty and of their native soil.

Our car stops in a village. A few women in white kerchiefs, some boys and a bareheaded old man are standing about and watching a young fellow in a tattered jacket who is digging the earth with a spade, while his German tommy gun lies on the ground nearby. How many fresh white crosses we have seen along the road, bound with embroidered towels that are not even dusty as yet. How many open graves we have seen, how many tall old men of biblical austerity, their beards flaunted by the wind, carrying coffins for burial. These white crosses and open graves mark the path of the Germans.

Here, too, it seems, we are to witness a burial. Perhaps this young fellow is digging a grave for his beloved, or perhaps for his sister?

But it is not death that has brought these people together. In 1941 a village lad, just graduated from school, buried his textbooks and went off into the forest to join the partisans. Three years have elapsed, and today he has returned for his books. What a wonderful bit of symbolism! A partisan boy who has put down his gun and kneels in the dust raised by the armies moving on Minsk, thoughtful and still, lovingly, caressingly fingering the swollen yellow pages of his schoolbooks. His name is Anton. Hasten to him, Academy members, writers, professors! He is waiting for you.

We speed on, anxious to catch up with the advancing division. How are we to find our old Stalingrad friends in the dust and the smoke, the roar of motors, the clatter of tanks and self-propelled guns, the squeaking of the huge wheels of baggage trains pushing west, in the stream of barefoot children and white-kerchiefed women pushing east, returning to the homes from which they were driven by the Germans before the fighting.

Someone advised us, if we wished to avoid unnecessary halts and

enquiries, to seek the division by a sign that many people knew: there was a camel, called *Kuznechik* (Grasshopper), pulling a baggage cart in the division's artillery regiment. This native of Kazakhstan had accompanied the division all the way from Stalingrad to the Berezina. Liaison officers usually looked out for *Kuznechik* when they wanted to find the migratory Headquarters, and no enquiries were needed.

We laughed at this curious counsel, taking it as a joke, and rode on.

To an outsider, everything in this great moving stream might have seemed strange and unfamiliar, while he himself might have felt lost among thousands of people, all strangers to himself and seemingly to one another. But he would soon have realized, to his amazement, that all these people moving forward, overtaking one another, were very well acquainted.

There goes an infantry lieutenant, leading his platoon along a side path. He waves his hand to a young fellow in helmet and overalls riding on a self-propelled gun, and the latter nods and smiles, shouting something indistinguishable in the clatter of the tracks. A carter in a cap bleached white by the sun, his eyebrows, lashes and moustache grey with dust, shouts something to a tractor driver, just as grimy and dusty as himself. The latter surely cannot make out a word, but in any case he nods his head in reply.

Two lieutenants riding in the back of a light truck shout comments on the passing machines:

"There goes the major from the anti-tank regiment in his jeep.... Hey, there, Annie, don't stare so hard or you'll fall off.... Look, there's Lyuda from the Liaison Company. Watch 'er go!... Hello, there, Nikitin! Back from the hospital already? Going back to your outfit?"

For three years these people have been fighting shoulder to shoulder. These momentary encounters in the moving iron flood are an expression of the tie of friendship that binds all these lean, dusty, sun-tanned officers, non-coms and men, in their sun-bleached dust-grey tunics, with the medals on faded, dirty ribbons and the red and yellow wound stripes.

Our car drives into the woods. We ride in sudden quiet, as we have turned off the highway to follow an almost invisible side road. Under the widespread, substantial, seemingly moulded foliage of the

huge oaks, on the soft grass, which is always so tender and pleasant in old oak groves, stand three good-looking women. The shadows of the fretted leaves and bright spots of sunlight fall on their heads and shoulders. How beautiful the quiet summer day! And how bitterly these women weep at the least chance word that barely touches on their great sorrow.

In almost every Byelorussian village we heard of the calamity that has overtaken thousands and thousands of mothers.

Some two weeks before the fighting started, the Germans began collecting children between the ages of eight and twelve in all the villages. They said they were going to send them to school. But soon everybody knew that the children were being kept in camps, surrounded by barbed wire. The mothers went to them, from scores of miles around.

"The mothers cried, and the little ones screamed and pressed up against the barbed wire," says one of the women.

Then the children suddenly disappeared. What had become of them? Had they been killed, or driven off into slavery? Or were they being kept, as rumour had it, in hospitals for German officers, where their blood was transfused to wounded Germans?

What consolation can one offer to inconsolable grief?

Further down the road, two swift shadows flashed among the trees as our car came in sight. Two young girls who had been picking wild strawberries were running away as fast as their legs could carry them.

"Hey, there," shouted our driver, "don't be scared! We're not Germans!"

Then the girls came out into the open, giggling and covering their mouths with their kerchiefs. They offered us their square woven baskets, full of wild strawberries.

Again we entered the main road, into dust and din. And the first thing we saw was a camel harnessed to a cart. Its hide was brown and bare, with hardly a vestige of wool. So here was the famous *Kuznechik!* A crowd of German prisoners came by just then, and the camel turned its ugly head, with disdainfully hanging lip, in their direction. It was probably attracted by the unfamiliar colour of their clothing, or perhaps by an unfamiliar smell. The driver called to the escort: "Hand over those Germans! *Kuznechik* will gobble 'em down in two ticks!" We soon learned the camel's story.

When the firing begins, we were told, it hides in shell holes or bomb craters. It is entitled to three wound stripes. The commander of the artillery regiment, Kapramanyan, has promised the driver a reward if he brings *Kuznechik* safe and sound to Berlin. "I'll hang your chest full of medals," he said very seriously, only his eyes smiling.

Guided by *Kuznechik,* we quickly found the Gurtiev Division.

II

MANY OF THE OLD FRIENDS were gone from Gurtiev's Division. Some I had known personally, and will long remember, despite the brevity of our encounters; others I had known only by the tales told of their great deeds. Gurtiev himself was gone, fallen in the fight for Orel. He had thrown himself in front of his commander, General Gorbatov, when a shell burst in their observation post. Gorbatov's cap had been spattered with the blood of this soldier-general. But I still found those tireless fighters, Guards Colonel Svirin, Fugenfirov of the Artillery, and Ryvkin of the Sappers. Every now and then my eye would be caught by the green ribbon of the Stalingrad Medal, on officers, sergeants, corporals.

Those who are gone have been replaced by new, young forces, and in them lives the unconquerable spirit of their fallen predecessors. It is a custom in this Division to hand on the weapons of fallen Stalingrad fighters to new young heroes. General Gurtiev's revolver is now worn by his lieutenant son; the revolver that belonged to sapper Bryssin is worn by his friend Dudnikov. Of the younger sappers, clever, fearless Chernorotov is already rising to fame.

Back in Stalingrad, there was a liaison man in the Division named Putilov. Communications broke down, and he went out to repair the line. He was fatally wounded, but he managed to pick up the ends of the wire and clench his teeth on them before he died. The line was repaired, held together by his dead mouth. Putilov's reel is now handed over to the best telephone men of the Division, as a banner, as the highest award. And it occurs to me that this wire that Putilov repaired at the Barricades Plant now stretches on from the Volga to the Berezina, from Stalingrad to Minsk, across the great expanses of our country, as a symbol of the unity and brotherhood that exist in our army and in our people.

We spent the night in the woods, in a tent belonging to the divi-

sional medical unit. Next morning we witnessed a strange scene. A wounded man was being carried through the woods, from one tent to another; and on the stretcher, at the wounded man's feet, sat two little kittens.

When we went into the tent, all the wounded men, lying on stretchers, or simply on the grass, were watching the kittens, whom the nurse was teasing with a fir twig. The little creatures went through all the usual antics: creeping on their bellies with waving tails, springing into the air and striking each other, rolling on their backs, hitting each other with their tails.

My eyes turned to the men. Only an hour or two before they had been in battle. Their tunics were torn by the deadly metal and stained with dark, clotted blood. But their grey pain-drawn faces of martyrs were lit up with smiles. It seemed that the scene they were watching was of unusual significance and importance: they had seen death, and now they were looking at life; they were reminded of their childhood, of their children, of their homes and were diverted from suffering and blood.

Only the nurse did not smile, because she was doing necessary work; it was medical treatment. And what tender sensitive feminine thought—to carry these living toys about through all one's migrations, when the fighting is never more than eight or ten kilometres away, just to lift the corners of bloodless lips in a smile!

Captain Ametistov, a veteran in the army, told me that he frequently had occasion to observe the truly touching affection for animals among the men in Gorbatov's units. One of the generals kept a pigeon that "drank tea." First it would peck at the sugar, then dip its beak into the saucer of water that had been poured for it. A certain tank commander, who was greatly respected, carried a hedgehog and a sly tom-cat with him. In the regiments there were tame rabbits and dogs with broken and healed legs. One regimental commander even tamed a fox that would run off into the woods in the daytime and come back to her owner in the evening.

Here again I wondered what lay behind this trifle. Was it just a whim, a desire for amusement, or did it speak of one and the same thing—the remarkable and all-embracing love of our people for life, for nature, for a world in which free man must wipe out the black forces of evil and be an intelligent and kind master!

III

When we rode into Bobruisk, some of the buildings were still in flames. Others lay in smoking ruins.

The road to Bobruisk was the road of vengeance! Our car had difficulty in making its way among the charred and mangled remains of German tanks and self-propelled guns. Hundreds and thousands of German corpses strew the road, lie in the wayside ditches, under the pines, and in the trampled green rye. They are being buried, but their number is so great that the work cannot be finished in a day. It was an unbearably hot day, too, and there was no wind, so that the people walking and riding down the road held their handkerchiefs to their noses and mouths. The cauldron of death boiled here; here vengeance was wreaked—grim, terrible vengeance on those who refused to lay down their arms and attempted to break through to the west along the roads we had cut off; vengeance on those who have drenched our soil with the blood of women and children.

At the approaches to flaming, demolished Bobruisk, on the low, sandy bank of the Berezina, sits a German soldier, wounded in the legs. His head raised, he watches the tanks crossing the bridge, the artillery and self-propelled cannon. A passing Red Army man scoops up some water in a tin and gives it to him to drink.

The thought involuntarily comes to one's mind: what would that German soldier have done in the summer of 1941, when the armoured columns of the fascist troops were crossing this bridge to the east, if one of our men had been sitting there, with broken legs, on the sandy bank of the Berezina? We know what he would have done. But we are human beings and that is why we have conquered the beast. The hour of judgment, of light over darkness, of good over evil is near! The hour of final retribution is approaching!

Again the open road, dust, rivers, fields, and the crackle of tommy guns in the woods!

In a dark, half-wrecked barn, the generals captured yesterday evening are undergoing a preliminary interrogation. Here are Lieutenant-General Heyne, the commander of the 6th Division, and that notorious executioner, commandant successively of Orel, Karachev, and Bobruisk, Major-General Adolf Hamann. In this barn we see the apotheosis of the pocket.

Heyne is wearing soldier's boots. His head is long and bald. He wipes the sweat from his crimson face, smiling and nodding. His voice is hoarse; perhaps he has caught a cold, or perhaps this is a result of the schnapps he drank to keep up his courage during his brief five days of action. His speech is wordy and confused—either he is still drunk, or he is simply constitutionally unable to think clearly and to express his thoughts in words. He recalls to mind another German prisoner—a captain whom I heard complaining, a few hours ago, of the extraordinarily low level of the German command of late, since Hitler replaced the caste generals by Nazi corporal-generals. Listening to Heyne's incoherent, boring and rambling speech, I thought: "Yes indeed, the fascist Hauptmanns and Oberleutnants certainly have something to complain about...." But now the questioners turn to Adolf Hamann, a short old man of extraordinary girth, with a beefy, red face and pendulous cheeks. Hitler has awarded him something like nine, or perhaps eleven, crosses and other tokens of distinction. They are spread out all across his fat chest, and his fat belly, and his fat flank.

A horrible sensation comes over you as you watch this Hamann. He has arms, and eyes, and hair, and he can talk—just like a human being. But he brings a vision of the opened graves that disclosed the bodies of hundreds and thousands of women and children, buried alive—corpses in which autopsy revealed particles of sand in the lungs. He brings a vision of the ruins of Orel, which he blew up into the air on August 4, 1943; of Karachev, which he wiped from the face of the earth; of Bobruisk, still wrapped in smoke and flame today.

This is the same gruff voice in which he gave instructions to his incendiaries. This is the same fleshy hand that signed the orders for the mass annihilation of helpless infants and old people. This fat leg, in its well-fitting boot, is the same that stamped down the earth over children and old women in whom life was not yet extinct. And you feel that it is a ghastly thing to breathe the same air with this inhuman creature. As is to be expected of a criminal, he denies everything—the wholesale massacre of Jews, the mass shooting of partisans, the driving away of the local population, and in general all acts of violence. According to him it seems that perhaps there was a case once in Orel when a man was executed for murder because of jealousy.

He is asked whether he blew up Orel. Yes, he replies, but then everybody knows, he is a soldier, and he was carrying out the orders of Schmidt, the commander of the Second Tank Army. Yes, indeed, in Karachev too he was carrying out orders from his superiors. And in Bobruisk as well.... Suddenly he casts a swift, sly, frightened glance at his interrogators—the glance of a grey-haired scoundrel and murderer, the glance of a coward.

See the repulsion, the repugnant curiosity in the eyes of the youngster with the tommy gun, in his khaki puttees and heavy boots.

It is almost eleven months now since the meeting in Orel at which General Gorbatov called on his men for vengeance, for the capture of the Orel hangman. The Red Army men have carried out their General's behest.

Our car speeds on and on, through the dense partisan forests. Bobruisk now lies far behind, and it is not so far to Minsk. Everything we see, everything that flashes in sight and instantly disappears from view, to remain forever in our memories—everything goes to show that good conquers evil, that light is stronger than darkness, that in a just cause man tramples the beast.

First Byelorussian Front

I

THE TERRAIN to the east of Warsaw along the Western Bug is an expanse of alternating sands and swamps interspersed with evergreen and deciduous forests. The landscape is drear and villages are rare. The narrow, sandy roads where wheels sink up to the axle and walking is difficult, are something for the traveller to avoid.

In the midst of this desolate country stands the small out-of-the-way station of Treblinka on the Siedlec railway branch line. It is some sixty kilometres from Warsaw and not far from Malkinia station where lines from Warsaw, Białystok, Siedlec and Łomza meet.

Many of those who were brought to Treblinka in 1942 may have had occasion to travel this way before the war. Staring out over the desolate landscape of pines, sand, more sand and again pines, scrubland, heather, unattractive station buildings and railway crossings, the pre-war passenger might have allowed his bored gaze to pause for a moment on a single-track spur running from the station into the forest to disappear amid the dense pines. This spur led to a pit where white sand was extracted for industrial purposes.

The sand pit is situated about four kilometres from the station in an open stretch of country surrounded on all sides by pine woods. The soil here is poor and barren, and the peasants do not cultivate it. And so the land is bare but for a few patches of moss and an occasional sickly pine. Now and then a jackdaw or a bright-combed hoopoe wings past, but no bird stops to build its nest here.

This desolate wasteland is the spot Heinrich Himmler, the SS Reichsführer, selected and approved for the site of a slaughterhouse the like of which the human race has not known from the age of primitive barbarism to these cruel days of ours. The main SS slaughterhouse, surpassing those at Sobibór, Majdanek, Bełzec and Oświęcim, was located here.

There were two camps in Treblinka: labour camp No. 1, where prisoners of various nationalities, chiefly Poles, worked, and camp No. 2 for Jews.

Camp No. 1, of the labour or punitive type, was located in the immediate vicinity of the sand pit, not far from the woods. It was one of the hundreds and thousands of similar camps the Hitlerites

set up in the occupied countries of Eastern Europe. It came into being in 1941. In it the various traits of the German character, distorted in the hideous mirror of the Hitler regime, co-existed in a sort of frightful unity. Thus do the delirious ravings of a fevered mind give an ugly, distorted reflection of the thoughts and emotions experienced by the patient before his illness. Thus does a madman distort the logical behaviour and thoughts of the normal person. Thus does the criminal commit his crime, combining in that hammer blow aimed at the bridge of the victim's nose the keen eye and the firm grip of the foundry worker with a cold-bloodedness that is sub-human.

The thrift, precision, calculation and pedantic cleanliness common to many Germans are not bad traits in themselves. Applied to agriculture or to industry they produce laudable results. Hitlerism applied these traits to crime against mankind and the Reich's SS behaved in the Polish labour camp exactly as though they were raising cauliflower or potatoes.

The area of the camp was laid out in neat rectangles; the barracks stood in the straightest of rows; the paths were lined with birches and covered with gravel. There were concrete ponds for domestic fowl, pools for washing laundry with steps leading conveniently down, various services for the German personnel—a modern bakery, barbershop, garage, a gasolene-pump topped by a glass ball, warehouses. Built on approximately the same principle—with the gardens, the drinking fountains, the concrete paths—was the camp at Majdanek and dozens of other labour camps in East Poland where the Gestapo and the SS intended settling down. German precision and petty calculation, the pedantic fondness for orderliness, the German love for time tables and charts with the minutest details worked out were reflected in the layout of these camps.

People were brought to the labour camp for brief periods, sometimes no more than four, five or six months. They were Poles who had violated laws laid down by the governor-generalship—minor violations, as a rule, since the penalty for major violations was immediate death. A slip of the tongue, a chance word overheard on the street, failure to make some delivery, refusal to give a cart or a horse to a German, the harsh word of a girl declining the amorous advances of some SS man, not sabotage at factories but mere suspicion of the possibility of sabotage—these were the offences that brought hundreds and thousands of Polish workers, peasants and intellectuals,

men and girls, mothers of families, old people and juveniles, to this labour camp. Altogether about 50,000 people passed through its gates. Jews were sent there only if they happened to be skilled workers in their field—bakers, shoemakers, cabinet-makers, stone-masons or tailors. The camp had all manner of workshops, including a substantial furniture factory which supplied armchairs, tables and chairs to German Army Headquarters.

Camp No. 1 existed from the autumn of 1941 to July 23, 1944. It was completely destroyed when the prisoners could already hear the distant rumble of Soviet guns.

Early in the morning of July 23, the guards and SS men took a stiff drink and set to work to wipe out all trace of the camp. By nightfall all the inmates had been killed and buried. Only one man survived—Max Levit, a Warsaw carpenter, who was only wounded and lay beneath the bodies of his comrades until nightfall, when he crawled off into the forest. He told us how as he lay there at the bottom of the pit he heard a group of some thirty young lads singing a popular Soviet song, "Vast Is My Native Land," before being shot down; heard one of the boys cry out: "Stalin will avenge us!"; heard the boys' leader, young Leib, who had been everyone's favourite in the camp, scream after the first volley: "*Panie* Watchman, you didn't kill me! Shoot again, please! Shoot again!"

It is now possible to reconstruct the picture of the German regime in this labour camp from the accounts of dozens of witnesses—Polish men and women who escaped or were released from it at one time or another. We know how they worked in the sand pit; we know that those who did not fulfil their quota of work were pushed over the edge of a cliff into the abyss below. We know that the workers received a food ration of 170-200 grams of bread and a litre of some indescribable liquid which passed for soup; we know of the deaths from starvation, of the hunger-swollen wretches who were taken outside the camp on wheelbarrows and shot. We know of the savage orgies in which the Germans indulged; we know that they raped girls and shot them immediately afterwards; that they pushed people off a tower six metres high; that drunken Germans broke into the barracks at night, grabbed ten or fifteen prisoners and calmly commenced to demonstrate their adeptness in murdering their victims by shooting through the heart, the back of the head, the eye, the mouth or the temple. We know the names of the SS men in this camp, we know their characters and

idiosyncracies. We know about the chief of the camp, a Dutch German named Van Eipen, an insatiable murderer and sex pervert who had a passion for good horses and reckless riding. We know about the massively-built young Stumpfe who was invariably overcome by a paroxysm of uncontrollable laughter whenever he killed anyone or when executions were carried out in his presence. "Laughing Death" they called him, and Max Levit was the last to hear him laugh as he lay at the bottom of the pit on July 23, 1944, when the boys were shot at Stumpfe's orders.

We know Sviderski, the one-eyed German from Odessa, known as the "hammer expert" because of his consummate skill at killing without firearms. Within the space of a few minutes he hammered to death fifteen children between the ages of eight and thirteen declared unfit for work. We know the skinny SS man known as "old Preifi," a gloomy and morose individual who looked like a Gypsy. "Old Preifi" relieved the monotony of his existence by sitting near the garbage dump and shooting camp inmates who would steal over to pick up potato peels. He would force his victim to open his jaws and then shoot him in the mouth.

We know the names of the professional murderers Schwarz and Ledeke who amused themselves by shooting at prisoners returning from work. They killed twenty to forty people every day.

There was nothing human about these creatures. Warped minds, hearts and souls, their words, behaviour and habits were like a horrible caricature of the behaviour, habits, thoughts and feelings of normal Germans. The order that existed in the camp; the documentation of the murders; the predilection for monstrous practical jokes faintly reminiscent of the jokes of drunken German student brawls; the chorus singing of sentimental songs amid pools of blood; the speeches they were continually delivering to their doomed victims; the sermons and pious, neatly printed texts hung all over the place—all these were the monster dragons and reptiles that had sprung from the embryo of traditional German chauvinism, the arrogance, conceit, vanity, self-assurance, slobbery nest-feathering and utter indifference to the fate of all living beings, arising from a fierce, blind conviction that German science, music, poetry, language, flower beds, waterclosets, sky, beer and homes were the finest and best in the whole universe. The horrible vices and fearful crimes of these people were offshoots of the vices of the German national character.

Such was the routine in this camp, this lesser Majdanek. One might think that there could be nothing more terrible in all the world. Yet those who lived in Camp No. 1 knew very well that there was something a hundred times more ghastly than their camp.

Within three kilometres of the labour camp the Germans built a slaughterhouse for Jews. Construction was started in May, 1942, and proceeded at a rapid pace with more than a thousand workers on the job. Everything in this camp was adapted for death. It was Himmler's intention to keep this camp a dead secret. Not a single human being was to leave it alive. And no outsider was permitted to approach the place. Anybody who chanced within a kilometre of the camp was shot at without warning. Luftwaffe craft were forbidden to fly over this area. The victims brought hither by trainloads over a special branch line were ignorant of the fate awaiting them up to the last moment. The guards escorting the trains were not allowed inside the camp grounds; SS men took over the trains at a distance of two hundred metres from the camp. The trains, usually consisting of sixty cars, would be divided into three sections in the woods outside the camp and the locomotive would haul twenty cars at a time up to the camp platform, shunting them from behind so as to stop outside the barbed-wire fence. Thus neither a locomotive engineer nor a fireman ever crossed the boundary line. When one batch of cars had been unloaded, the non-commissioned SS officer on duty would signal for the next twenty cars. When all sixty cars were empty, the camp officials would telephone to the railway station for the next train, while the empty train would proceed further up the line to the sand pit, where it would load up with sand and pull out for Treblinka and Malkinia.

Treblinka was well located. Trainloads of victims came here from all the four points of the compass—West, East, North and South. Trains pulled in from the Polish cities of Warsaw, Międzyrzecze, Częstochowa, Siedlec, Radom; from Łomza, Białystok, Grodno and many Byelorussian towns; from Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Bulgaria and Bessarabia.

For thirteen months the trains rolled in to Treblinka. Each train consisted of sixty cars, and on each car were chalked the figures 150, 180 or 200, depending on the number of people inside. Railway workers and peasants secretly kept count of these trains. Kazimierz Skarzuński, a sixty-two-year-old peasant from the village of Wulka (the inhabited point nearest to the camp), told me that on some days as

many as six trains would pass along the Siedlec line alone and hardly a day passed throughout these thirteen months without at least one train passing by. And yet the Siedlec line was but one of the four railways supplying Treblinka. Lucjan Żukowa, a railway section hand mobilized by the Germans for work on the line between Treblinka and Camp No. 2, said that from one to three trains were sent up to the camp from Treblinka every day between June 15, 1942, and August 1943, the period he worked there. Each train had sixty cars and in each car there were no less than one hundred and fifty people. We are in possession of dozens of similar statements. Even if we were to cut the figures cited by witnesses of the movement of trains to Treblinka by one half, the number of people brought there during the thirteen months would amount to something like three million.

The fenced-in area of the camp with its warehouses for the belongings of the executed, platforms and other auxiliary premises occupied an insignificant area, 780 metres in length and 600 metres in width. If one were to entertain the slightest doubt as to the fate of the millions who were brought here, or to assume for a moment that they were not murdered immediately upon arrival, the question then arises: what became of all these people of whom there were enough to populate a small state or a large European capital? Where are they? For thirteen months or 396 days, the trains returned empty or loaded with sand; not a single one of those who were brought to Camp No. 2 ever returned. The time has come to ask the stern question: "Cain, where are they whom thou broughtest hither?"

Fascism did not succeed in concealing its terrible crime. But not because thousands of people were its unwilling witnesses. Confident that he could act with impunity, Hitler took the decision to exterminate millions of innocent people during the summer of 1942 when the Wehrmacht was at the zenith of its sanguinary career. It can now be proved that the statistics of the murders perpetrated by the Germans reach their highest mark in 1942. Confident that they could act with impunity, the fascists showed what they are capable of.

Had Adolf Hitler been victorious, he would have succeeded in covering up all the traces of his crimes; he would have forced all the witnesses to be silent, even if there had been scores of thousands instead of a few thousand. Not one of them would have uttered a word. And once again you cannot help wanting to pay homage to the men who in the autumn of 1942, when the whole world that is now hum-

ming so noisily and victoriously was silent, battled in Stalingrad on the banks of the Volga against the German army, a river of innocent blood smoking and gurgling behind their backs. It was the Red Army that prevented Himmler from keeping the secret of Treblinka.

Today the witnesses have spoken, the very stones and earth have cried aloud. And now, before the conscience of the whole world, before the eyes of all mankind, we can reconstruct step by step a picture of the Treblinka hell, compared to which Dante's inferno was a harmless satanic frolic.

Everything recorded here has been compiled from the accounts of living witnesses, the testimony of people who worked in Treblinka from the first day of its existence until August 2, 1943, when the doomed people who made up its population rose up against their executioners, set fire to the camp and escaped into the woods, and from the testimony of apprehended guards who bit by bit confirmed and in many respects supplemented the stories of the eye-witnesses. I have seen these people and heard their stories and have their written testimony before me as I write this. All this voluminous evidence emanating from so many different sources dovetails in every respect, beginning with the description of the habits of Bari, the commandant's dog, and ending with the technology of murder and the mechanism of the death conveyor.

Let me conduct you through the hell on earth that was Treblinka.

Who were the people brought here by the trainload? Mainly Jews, and to a lesser extent Poles and Gypsies.

By the spring of 1942 almost the entire Jewish population of Poland, Germany and the western districts of Byelorussia had been rounded up in ghettos. Millions of Jewish workers, artisans, doctors, professors, architects, engineers, teachers, art workers and other professionals together with their wives and children, mothers and fathers lived in the ghettos of Warsaw, Radom, Częstochowa, Lublin, Białystok, Grodno and dozens of other smaller towns. In the Warsaw ghetto alone there were about 500,000 Jews. Confinement to the ghetto was evidently the first, preparatory stage of the Hitler plan for the extermination of the Jews.

The summer of 1942 was chosen as the most suitable time to effect the second stage of the plan: physical extermination.

Himmler came to Warsaw and issued orders. The work of preparing the Treblinka slaughterhouse proceeded without a stop, day and

night. In July, the first trainloads were on their way to Treblinka from Warsaw and Częstochowa. The victims were told that they were being taken to the Ukraine for farm work, and were permitted to take twenty kilograms of baggage and food with them. In many cases the Germans forced their victims to purchase railway tickets to the station of Ober-Majdan, their code name for Treblinka. The code name was adopted because Treblinka soon acquired such fearful notoriety throughout Poland that it had to be dropped. The treatment of the victims, however, was such as to leave little doubt in their minds as to the fate in store for them. No less than 150 persons, and in most cases, 180 to 200, were crowded into each box car. They were given nothing to drink throughout the journey, which sometimes lasted two or three days. People suffered so from thirst that many were reduced to drinking their own urine. The guards offered a mouthful of water for 100 zloty, but usually pocketed the money without giving anything in return. The prisoners were packed so tightly that each trip, especially in hot weather, almost always took a toll of several old people and persons with heart ailments. Inasmuch as the doors were sealed throughout the journey, the bodies would begin to decompose, befouling the already nauseating air. It was enough for any of the prisoners to strike a match during the night for the guards to fire through the walls of the car. Abram Kohn, a barber, states that five persons in his car were killed and many wounded as a result of such shooting.

The trains that came to Treblinka from the West-European countries—France, Bulgaria, Austria and others—were another matter entirely. These people had not heard of Treblinka and up to the last minute they believed they were being sent to work. The Germans painted alluring pictures of the pleasures and conveniences of the new life awaiting the settlers. Some trains brought people who thought they were being taken to some neutral country. Victims of a gruesome hoax, they had paid the German authorities large sums of money for passports and foreign visas.

Once a train arrived in Treblinka with Canadian, American and Australian citizens who had been stranded in Europe and Poland when the war broke out. After lengthy negotiations involving the payment of huge bribes, they had succeeded in gaining permission to travel to neutral countries.

All the trains from the West-European countries were unguarded and provided with the normal sleepers and dining-cars. The passen-

gers had large trunks and valises with them and abundant supplies of food, and when the trains stopped at stations the travellers' children would run out to ask how far it was to Ober-Majdan.

There were occasional trainloads of Gypsies from Bessarabia and elsewhere. Several trains brought young Polish peasants and workers who had taken part in uprisings and fought in partisan detachments.

It is hard to say which is worse: to go to one's death in terrible agony, knowing that the end is near, or to gaze calmly and unsuspectingly out of the window of a comfortable coach at the very moment when a phone call is being put through from Treblinka to the camp announcing the time of the train's arrival and giving the number of people in it.

To keep up the farce at the expense of the people coming from Western Europe until the very last moment, the railhead at the death camp was got up to look like a railway station. The platform at which each batch of twenty cars was unloaded had a regular station building with ticket offices, a baggage room, a restaurant and arrows pointing in all directions with the signs: "To Białystok," "To Baranowicze," "To Wołkowysk," etc. As the trains pulled in a band of well-dressed musicians struck up a tune. A station guard in railway uniform collected the tickets from the passengers, letting them through to a large square.

Thus three to four thousand people carrying suitcases, bags and bundles and supporting the aged and the weak, would find themselves on this square. Among them were mothers who carried infants in their arms, while older children huddled against their skirts, staring curiously at the strange surroundings. There was something frightening about this square which had been tramped down by so many millions of human feet. With growing dread the passengers became aware of alarming signs all around them: a bundle of clothing, an open valise, some shaving brushes and enamelled kitchenware lying here and there on the square that had obviously been hastily swept a few minutes before their arrival. How had they come there? And why was it that just beyond the station the railway line ended in a stretch of sere grass and a six-metre barbed-wire fence? Where were the railways to Białystok, to Siedlec, Warsaw and Wołkowysk? And what accounted for the strange smile on the faces of the new guards as they watched the men straightening their ties, the neatly attired old ladies, the young boys in sailor suits, the slim girls who had miracu-

lously contrived to look fresh and attractive after their long journey, the young mothers, who tenderly adjusted their infants' blankets?

All these guards in black uniforms and the SS non-commissioned officers resembled cattle drivers at the entrance to a slaughterhouse. For them the newly arrived group did not consist of living human beings and their lips curled automatically at these manifestations of embarrassment, love, fear, solicitude for others and concern for the safety of belongings. It amused them to hear mothers scolding their children for running off a few steps, to see the men pull out clean handkerchiefs to wipe their perspiring brows and light cigarettes, to watch the girls tucking back a stray lock and holding down their skirts when a gust of wind blew. It struck them as funny that the old men tried to squat down on suitcases, that some carried books under their arms and wore mufflers and scarves around their throats.

Anything up to 20,000 people passed through Treblinka every day. Days when only six or seven thousand came out of the station building were considered wasted. The square was filled with people four and five times a day. And all these thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of people with the frightened, questioning eyes, all these young and old faces, these pretty dark-haired and fair-haired girls, the stooped and baldheaded old men, the timid youngsters—all of them merged into a single flood that swept away reason, human knowledge, maidenly love, childish wonder, the coughing of old men and the throbbing hearts of living human beings.

The new arrivals trembled inwardly as they sensed the strangeness of that cool, smug leer on the faces of the Hitlerites watching them, the look of a live beast that feels its superiority over a dead man. In those brief moments on the square the newcomers found themselves noticing more and more incomprehensible and alarming details.

What was behind that massive six-metre wall completely covered with yellowing pine branches and blankets? The blankets too inspired fear: they were quilted or gaily coloured, silk, or in calico covers, exactly like those lying in the bedrolls of the newly arrived travellers. How had they come here? Who had brought them? And where were their owners? Why had they no further use for their blankets? And who were these men with the blue bands on their arms? They began to recall all the stories they had heard recently, all the terrifying rumours that had been whispered back and forth. No, no, it could not be! And they dismissed the fearful thought.

This feeling of alarm lasted for a few moments, until all the passengers had emerged on the square. There was always a slight delay at this point for in every party there were crippled, lame, aged and sick people who had to be helped along.

But now the train was empty and the square full. In a loud voice an Unterscharführer (junior non-commissioned SS officer) instructed the passengers to leave all their things on the square and prepare to go to the bathhouse, taking along only personal papers, valuables and toilet accessories. No doubt a dozen questions occurred to the people—should they take clean underwear, might they undo their bundles, would their belongings not get mixed up or lost if they did? But some mysterious, irresistible force impelled them to hurry forward in silence without asking questions or turning round, impelled them toward the opening in the six-metre barbed-wire fence camouflaged with boughs.

Inside they walked past tank obstacles, past the barbed-wire fence three times the height of a man, past an anti-tank ditch three metres wide, past thin coils of steel wire strewn on the ground to trip up the fugitive and catch him like a fly in a spiderweb, and again past a high barbed-wire fence. A terrible sensation of despair, a feeling of utter helplessness would seize the newcomer. There could be no question of escaping, of going back, or of fighting; from the low squat wooden towers the muzzles of heavy machine guns stared menacingly at them. Cry for help? What was the use with all these SS men and guards armed with tommy guns, hand grenades and pistols? Power was in their hands. Theirs the tanks and aircraft, the land, the towns, theirs the sky, the railways, the laws, the newspapers and the radio. The whole world was silent, crushed and enslaved by the brown-shirted gang which had seized power. And only in one spot, thousands of kilometres off, Soviet artillery was pounding away on the distant Volga bank, stubbornly putting into effect the great will of the Russian people to fight to the death for liberty, disturbing the quiet, challenging the people of the world to fight.

In the meantime two hundred workers with pale-blue arm bands were busy on the station square silently, swiftly, deftly untying bundles, opening suitcases and baskets, removing straps from bedrolls. The possessions of the new arrivals were being sorted out and appraised. Neatly packed darning sets flew on the ground, skeins of thread, children's panties, shirts, sheets, jumpers, pocketknives, shav-

ing sets, packets of letters, photographs, thimbles, bottles of perfume, mirrors, night caps, shoes, warm boots, ladies' slippers, stockings, lace, pyjamas, parcels of butter, coffee, cans of cocoa, prayer robes, candlesticks, books, rusks, violins, children's blocks. It required considerable skill to sort out and classify within the space of a few minutes all these thousand and one articles, some for sending to Germany, the old and valueless to be laid aside for burning. Woe to the blundering worker who placed an old fibre suitcase on the pile of leather valises intended for shipment to Germany, or who threw a new pair of silk stockings with a Paris trade mark on a heap of old mended socks! Such a blunder could be made only once. The workers were not allowed to make the same mistake twice.

Forty SS men and sixty guards worked on "transport," as the first stage of the Treblinka tragedy was called. Their work involved meeting the trains, leading the passengers out of the "station" to the square, and watching over the workers who sorted and classified the possessions. While they worked the men with the pale-blue arm bands often popped into their mouths bits of bread, sugar or candies found in the baggage they were sorting, but they made sure that the guards did not see them for this was strictly forbidden. It was permitted, however, to wash up after the job was finished with eau de Cologne and perfume, for there was a shortage of water in Treblinka and only the Germans were permitted to use water for washing.

While the people were still preparing for their bath, the sorting of their possessions was being completed. The valuable articles were carried away to the warehouses, and the letters, photographs of newborn babies, brothers and brides, yellowed wedding announcements, all these precious bits of paper that had been treasured by their owners perhaps for years and that were just so much trash to the Treblinka officials, were collected in a pile and carted away to huge pits already partly filled with hundreds of thousands of similar letters, postcards, visiting cards, photographs, letters written in shaky childish handwriting and crude childish crayon drawings.

After a brief, hurried sweeping the square was ready to receive the next group of unfortunates.

Not always, however, did things go so smoothly. There were cases when prisoners who knew where they were being taken mutinied. A peasant by the name of Skrzeminski saw people smash their way out of two trains, knock down the guards and run for the forest. In

both cases everyone of the fugitives was killed. Four children between the ages of four and six were killed with them. Similar cases of skirmishes between the victims and the guards were described by a peasant woman named Marianna Kobus. Working in the fields one day she saw sixty people break away from a train and make for the forest. They were all shot down before her eyes.

In the meantime the group inside the camp had passed on to another square, already beyond the second camp barrier. On this square stood a huge barrack-like building, and to the right of it, three other barracks, two for storing clothing and the third for footwear. On the west side of the camp were the buildings housing the SS men and guards, food stores, stables, and automobiles, trucks and an armoured car. The general impression was that of the usual concentration camp.

In the southeastern corner of the camp grounds, fenced off by branches, was a compound with a booth bearing the sign "Infirmary" in front. All the feeble and sick were separated from the crowd waiting for the bath and carried off on stretchers to this infirmary, where a man wearing the white doctor's smock and a red-cross band on his left arm met them. What happened inside the infirmary I shall describe later on.

The next step in handling the new arrivals was to break their will by barking curt rapid-fire commands at them with the German "r" sounding like a whiplash, an accomplishment of which the German army is inordinately proud and which is regarded as one of the proofs that the Germans belong to the "master race."

"*Achtung!*" the command would ring over the crowd and in the leaden silence the voice of the Scharführer would be heard issuing instructions repeated several times a day for many months on end:

"The men are to remain where they are. Women and children undress in the buildings on the left."

Here, according to witnesses, the heartrending scenes usually began. The instinct of maternal, conjugal, filial love told the victims that they were seeing one another for the last time. Handshakes, kisses, blessings, tears, briefly murmured words invested with all the love, all the anguish, all the tenderness and despair that filled them were now exchanged. The SS psychiatrists of death knew that these emotions had to be stamped out at once. The psychiatrists of death were familiar with the primitive laws that operate in all the slaughter-

houses of the world, laws which in Treblinka were applied by the cattle to the human beings. This was one of the most critical moments, the moment when daughters were separated from fathers, mothers from sons, grandmothers from grandsons, husbands from wives.

Again the words "*Achtung! Achtung!*" rent the air. This was precisely the moment when the minds of the victims had to be befuddled again, when a glimmer of hope had to be allowed to dawn, when death had to be made for a few moments to look like life.

"Women and children are to remove their footwear on entering the building," barks the same voice. "Stockings are to be placed inside shoes. Children's stockings inside children's sandals, boots and shoes. Be orderly."

And again: "On entering the bathhouse take with you valuables, documents, money, soap and towel.... I repeat...."

Inside the women's bathhouse was a hairdressers' department. As soon as they were undressed the women lined up to have their hair clipped off. Strange psychological effect: this final haircut, according to the testimony of the hairdressers themselves, had a reassuring effect on the women; it seemed to convince them that they really were about to take a bath. Young girls felt their close-cropped heads critically and asked the barber if she wouldn't please smooth out some of the uneven spots. The women usually calmed down after the haircut. Nearly all of them passed out of the dressing-room carrying a piece of soap and a folded towel. Some of the younger ones wept to part with their flowing tresses. Why were the women thus shorn? To deceive them? No, the hair was needed in Germany. It was a raw material....

I asked many people what the Germans did with all the hair they removed from the heads of these living corpses. According to all the witnesses, the huge mountains of black, golden, chestnut hair, straight, curly and braided, were first disinfected and then pressed into sacks and shipped to Germany. All the witnesses questioned confirmed that the sacks containing this hair had German addresses on them. What was it used for? None of the camp personnel could answer this question. According to the written testimony of one Kohn, however, the hair was used by the navy to fill mattresses, to make hausers for submarines and for other similar purposes.

It seems to me that this testimony requires additional confirma-

tion; Grossadmiral Räder, who headed the German navy in 1942, will furnish it.

The men undressed in the yard. Of the first group of the morning arrivals some 150 to 300 would be selected for their physical strength to be used to bury the corpses. These would be killed the following day. The men were told to undress quickly, but were also warned to put down their clothes neatly, shoes, socks, underwear, coats and trousers separately. These things were sorted out by another team of workmen wearing red arm bands as distinct from the blue bands worn by the station team. Articles of clothing considered fit to be sent to Germany were taken away at once to the warehouse. All labels were carefully removed. The rest of the articles were burned or buried.

The feeling of alarm grew, heightened by a fearful stench mingled with the odour of lime that assailed the nostrils. What accounted for such huge swarms of fat and troublesome flies? Pine woods and paved ground did not usually breed flies. The men began to breathe heavily; they started at every sound and stared hard at every trifle in search of an explanation, a hint that would help them to unravel the mystery and gain an inkling of the fate in store for them. What, for instance, were those gigantic excavators doing over at the southern end of the camp grounds?

The next stage in the procedure began. The naked people were lined up at a window through which they were told to hand over their documents and valuables. And again the frightful, hypnotizing voice rapped out: "*Achtung! Achtung!* The penalty for hiding valuables is death! *Achtung!*"

A Scharführer sat in a small wooden booth. SS men and guards stood around him. Next to the booth were wooden boxes into which the valuables were thrown—one for paper-money, another for coins, a third for wrist watches, rings, earrings and brooches with precious stones, and bracelets. Documents were thrown on the ground, for no one had any earthly use for these documents belonging to living corpses who within an hour would be lying stiff and dead in a pit. The gold and valuables, however, were carefully sorted out; dozens of jewellers were engaged in ascertaining the purity of the metal and the value of the stones and diamonds.

The remarkable thing is that the beasts in human shape made use of everything—leather, paper, cloth; everything that served men

was of use to the beasts, everything except the most precious thing on earth—human life. Think of all the brilliant minds, the sterling souls, the wonder-filled children's eyes, the sweet old faces, the proud and beautiful girlish heads to fashion which nature had toiled for untold ages, think of all this as a huge silent flood precipitated into oblivion. A few minutes sufficed to destroy that which had taken nature aeons of travail to evolve.

The spell of illusion was broken at this point. Here at the booth ended the anguish of uncertainty that had kept the people in a fever of anxiety, causing them to pass within the space of a few minutes from hope to despair, from visions of life to visions of death. This torture by deception was part of the conveyor system at this slaughter-house, it aided the SS men in their work. When the final act of robbing the living corpses was over, the attitude of the Germans to their victims underwent a sharp change. Rings were torn off unwilling fingers, and earrings wrenched out of ears.

At this final stage, speed was important for the smooth working of the death conveyor. Hence the word "*Achtung*" was replaced by another word, a hissing, compelling word: "*Schneller! Schneller! Schneller!*" "Faster! Faster! Faster into oblivion!"

Experience has shown that when stripped a man loses his power of resistance and ceases to resist his fate; having lost his clothes, he seems to lose his instinct of self-preservation and accepts what happens to him as the inevitable. He who a moment before wished passionately to live becomes passive and apathetic. In order to make doubly sure, however, the SS employed at this last stage of their gruesome death conveyor a monstrous method of stunning their victims, of reducing them to a state of complete mental paralysis.

How was this done?

By switching over suddenly to senseless and inexplicable brutality. These naked men and women who had been stripped of everything but who continued stubbornly to remain human, a thousand times more human than the creatures in German uniforms surrounding them, still breathed, still saw, still thought, their hearts still beat. Suddenly the soap and towels were knocked out of their hands. They were lined up five in a row and marched off to the accompaniment of rapped out commands:

"*Hände hoch! Marsch! Schneller! Schneller!*"

They were marched down a straight avenue about 120 metres long

and two wide, and bordered by flowers and firs. This path led to the place of execution.

Wire was stretched along either side of the path, which was lined by guards in black uniforms and SS men in grey standing shoulder to shoulder. The path was covered with white sand and as the victims marched forward with upraised arms they saw the fresh imprint of bare feet on the sand: the small footprints of women, the tiny footprints of children, the impress of heavy aged feet. These faint tracks on the sand were all that remained of the thousands of people who had recently passed down this path just as the present four thousand were passing now and as the next four thousand would pass two hours later and the thousands more waiting there on the railway track in the woods. Passed as they had the day before, ten days before, as they would pass tomorrow and fifty days hence, as they had passed throughout the thirteen months of the existence of the hell at Treblinka.

The Germans called it "the road from which there is no return."

Smirking and grimacing, a fiend in human shape whose name was Suckhomil, ran alongside shouting in deliberately distorted German:

"Now then, lads, faster, faster! Your bath water is cooling. *Schneller, Kinder, schneller!*"

And bursting into loud guffaws the creature danced in a frenzy of delight. The victims moved on in silence with upraised arms between the two rows of guards, who beat them with rifle butts and rubber truncheons as they went by. Children ran to keep up with the grown-ups.

The brutality of one of the fiends, an SS man called Zepf, especially impressed itself on all who witnessed this mournful procession. Zepf specialized in child-killing. Endowed with unusual physical strength, this creature would suddenly snatch up a child from the ranks and either dash out his brains by flinging him against the ground or tear him in two.

When I heard about this creature who had evidently been born of a woman I could not believe the unimaginable and incredible things that were told of him. But when these stories were repeated to me by people who had seen with their own eyes, I believed and I realized that what they had seen was merely one of the details that fitted perfectly into the whole gruesome picture of Treblinka.

Zepf's acts were part of the hideous farce staged by the tormen-

tors to stun the mentality of their doomed victims; they were an expression of the senseless cruelty employed for the purpose of undermining will and consciousness. It was an essential screw in the huge machine of the fascist state.

The horror of it is not that nature should beget such degenerates—for there is much that is freakish in the organic world—such as cyclopes, two-headed creatures, and creatures with corresponding mental deformities and abnormalities. What is dreadful is that these creatures, who ought to have been isolated and placed under observation as psychiatric phenomena, should be allowed to exist and function as citizens in some one state. Their insane mentality, their diseased minds, their phenomenal crimes are the necessary elements of the fascist state. Thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of creatures like these form the backbone of German fascism, the mainstay and foundation of Hitler Germany. Dressed in uniforms, carrying weapons, and decorated with orders of the empire, these creatures lorded it for years over the lives of the European peoples. It is not the creatures themselves that should fill us with horror, but the state that caused them to crawl out of their holes, and made them useful, indispensable and irreplacable in places like Treblinka, near Warsaw, at the Lublin Majdanek, in Bełzec, in Sobibór, in Oświęcim, in Baby Yar, in Domanevka and Bogdanovka near Odessa, in Trostyanets near Minsk, at Ponary in Lithuania, in tens and hundreds of prisons, labour and punitive camps, camps for the extinction of life.

The journey from the booth to the place of execution took only a few minutes. Hurried forward by blows, deafened by shouts, the victims reached the third open lot, and for a moment halted in astonishment.

Before them stood a handsome stone building decorated with wooden fretwork and built in the style of an ancient temple. Five broad concrete steps led up to a low, massive and handsomely decorated door. Flowers grew at the entrance. For the rest, however, chaos reigned. There were mountains of fresh earth everywhere. A huge excavator clanked and rattled as it dug up tons of yellow sandy soil with its steel jaws, raising a cloud of dust that blotted out the sun. The roar of the machine digging huge graves from morning till night mingled with the savage barking of dozens of Alsatian dogs.

On either side of the temple of death ran narrow-gauge lines over which men in loose overalls pushed small self-dumping waggonettes.

The wide door of the slaughterhouse opened slowly and two of the assistants of Schmitt, the chief of the death factory, appeared at the entrance. These were sadists and maniacs. One, aged about thirty, was tall with massive shoulders, dark hair and a swarthy face beaming with excitement; the other, slightly younger, was short, brown-haired, with a pasty, jaundiced complexion. The names of these traitors to mankind are known.

The tall one held a heavy piece of gas piping, about a metre long, and a whip. The second carried a sabre.

At this moment the SS men released the dogs who in obedience to careful training threw themselves on the crowd and dug their teeth into the bare flesh of the doomed people. With savage cries the SS men brought their rifle butts down on the women, who stood rooted to the spot with terror.

Inside the building Schmitt's men drove the victims into the gas chambers.

At that moment Kurt Franz, one of the Treblinka commandants, would appear, leading his dog Bari on a leash. Bari had been trained by his master to tear out the victims' sex organs. Kurt Franz had made quite a career for himself in the camp. Beginning as a junior non-commissioned SS officer, he had been promoted to the fairly high rank of an Untersturmführer. This tall, skinny thirty-five-year-old SS man not only displayed organizing abilities, not only loved his work and imagined no occupation for which he was better suited than the supervision of Treblinka, but, in addition to all this, he was something of a theoretician and loved to generalize and explain the meaning and significance of his work. It would have been a good thing if during these terrible moments the Pope and Mr. Brailsford and all the other humane defenders of Hitlerism had come to the gas chambers in the capacity of spectators, of course. They would have been able to add new arguments to their humanitarian preachings, books and articles. Incidentally, the Holy Father, who so benignly kept silent while Himmler was committing his atrocities against mankind, would have been able to calculate the number of batches in which the Germans could have put his whole Vatican through Treblinka.

Great is the power of humanity; humanity does not die until man dies. And when there comes a brief but terrifying period in history, a period in which the beast triumphs over man, to his last breath the man slain by the beast retains his strength of spirit, clarity of thought

and warmth of feeling. And the beast who slays the man remains a beast. In this immortal spiritual strength of human beings is a solemn martyrdom, the triumph of the dying man over the living beast. Therein, during the darkest days of 1942, lay the dawn of reason's victory over bestial madness, of good over evil, light over darkness, of the power of progress over the power of reaction; an awesome dawn breaking over a field of blood and tears, an ocean of suffering, a dawn breaking amid the screams and cries of perishing mothers and infants, amid the death rattle of the aged.

The beasts and the philosophy of the beasts foreshadowed the end of Europe, the end of the world; but people remained people. They did not accept the morals and laws of fascism, fighting with all the means at their disposal against them, fighting with their death as human beings.

I was shaken to the very depth of my being by the stories of how the living corpses of Treblinka up to the last minute preserved their human souls although they had lost everything else, how women tried to save their sons and for their sake accomplished feats of hopeless bravery, how young mothers tried to shield their infants with their bodies. No one knows and no one will ever know the names of these mothers. There are stories of little girls of ten who with divine wisdom comforted their sobbing mothers, of a little boy who on entering the gas chamber shouted: "The Russians will avenge us, mama, don't cry!" No one knows and no one will ever know the names of these children. We were told about dozens of doomed people who fought one against a legion of SS men armed with automatic weapons and grenades, and died standing up, their breasts riddled with bullets. We were told about the young man who stabbed an SS officer, about the lad who had taken part in the mutiny in the Warsaw ghetto and who by some miracle had managed to hide a grenade from the Germans and flung it into a group of executioners at the last moment. We heard about the battle that lasted all of one night between a group of the condemned and detachments of guards and SS men. The shooting and grenade explosions went on all through the night and when the sun rose the next morning the whole square was covered with the bodies of the fighters. Beside them lay their weapons—palings wrenched out of the fence, a knife, a razor. Never on this earth now will the names of these fallen fighters be known. We heard about the tall girl who tore a rifle out of the hands

of a guard on the "road from which there is no return," and fought against dozens of SS men. Two beasts were killed in that fight, and a third lost his arm. Terrible were the tortures to which this brave girl was subjected before she was finally put to death. She, too, is nameless.

Yet is that quite true? Hitlerism robbed these people of their homes and their lives. Hitlerism sought to wipe their names out of living memory. Yet every one of them, the mothers who shielded their children with their bodies, the children who dried their mothers' tears, those who fought with knives and flung grenades, those who fell in the nocturnal massacre, and the naked girl who, like some ancient Greek goddess, fought alone against dozens—all of these people who are no longer among the living have preserved forever the most splendid name of all, the name which the pack of Hitlers and Himmlers could not trample underfoot, the name of Man. History will inscribe as their epitaph: "They Died for Humanity."

Inhabitants of the village of Wulka, the settlement nearest Treblinka, say that sometimes the shrieks of the women who were being murdered were so terrible that the whole village would run for miles into the forest to get away from the piercing maddening cries that rent the air. Presently the screaming would subside only to break out again as terrible and soul-tearing as before.... And this was repeated three and four times a day.

I asked one of the executioners who had been taken prisoner about the cries. He explained that the women usually screamed when the dogs were unleashed on them and the whole crowd of doomed people were driven into the death house. "They saw their end coming. Besides it was very crowded inside; they were beaten unmercifully and the dogs tore at them."

The sudden silence fell when the doors of the gas chamber closed. The screaming broke out again when a fresh group was brought. This occurred twice, three times, four and sometimes five times a day. For Treblinka was not an ordinary slaughterhouse, it was run on the conveyor system copied from modern large-scale industry.

And like any industrial enterprise, Treblinka did not always work as efficiently as has been described above. It developed gradually as new equipment and new rationalization methods were introduced. In the beginning there were three small gas chambers. While these were under construction several trainloads of victims arrived and

the killing was done with axes, hammers and truncheons instead of fire-arms. This was done to prevent the surrounding population from suspecting the nature of the work at Treblinka. The first three concrete chambers were 5×5 metres in size, *i.e.*, they had an area of 25 sq.m. each. The height was 190 cm. Each chamber had two doors, one to admit the living, the other to serve as an exit for the gassed corpses. This second door was very wide—approximately two and a half metres. The three chambers were erected on one foundation.

These three chambers did not have the capacity Berlin demanded. It was then that the construction of the building described above was begun. Treblinka officials took pride in the fact that their gas chambers surpassed those of all the other Gestapo death factories in Majdanek, Sobibór and Bełzec for capacity and production floor space.

For five days 700 prisoners worked on the erection of the new death factory. When the work was at its height a foreman came from Germany with his crew and set about installing the equipment.

The new gas chambers, of which there were ten in all, were built symmetrically on the two sides of a wide concrete-floored corridor. Like the old three, they each had two doors, one from the corridor for the live victims, and another in the opposite wall to provide an outlet for the corpses. The latter led to platforms running on both sides of the building. Narrow-gauge tracks led up to the platforms. The corpses were first dumped onto the platforms and then loaded into waggonettes to be carried to the huge burial pits the excavators dug day and night. The floor of the gas chambers was laid at an incline toward the platforms to make it easier and faster to drag out the corpses. This was a substantial improvement over the old chambers where the corpses had to be carried out on stretchers or dragged out with straps.

Each new gas chamber was seven metres wide and eight long, 56 sq.m. in all. The area of all the new chambers totalled 560 sq.m. and the three old chambers, which continued to operate when there were smaller groups to be wiped out, brought the total lethal floor space of the Treblinka death factory up to 635 sq.m. From 400 to 600 were herded into each gas chamber at a time, which means that working at capacity the ten new chambers destroyed 4,000 to 6,000 lives at once.

At average operations pace the lethal chambers of the Treblinka

hell were filled at least two or three times a day (there were days when they were filled as many as six times). At the lowest estimate, two loadings a day of the new chambers alone meant the destruction of some 10,000 persons daily or some 300,000 every month. Treblinka was in operation every day for thirteen months. If however, we allow ninety days for stoppage, repairs and hitches in the delivery of the victims, it still leaves ten months of continuous operation. If the average number of victims a month was 300,000, in ten months Treblinka destroyed three million lives. Again we have the same fearful figure: three million; the first time we arrived at it through a deliberately low estimate of the number of victims brought in by train.

To snuff out life ten to twenty-five minutes were required, In the early period after the starting of the new chambers, when the executioners had not yet established the efficiency peak and were still experimenting, the victims were subjected to fearful torture lasting for two and three hours before life left their tormented bodies. During the very first days the intake and outlet installations worked badly and the victims writhed in agony for anything up to eight or ten hours.

Various means were employed to effect this mass slaughter. One of them was by forcing into the chambers the exhaust fumes from the engine of a heavy tank that served as a motor at the Treblinka power station. These fumes contained two to three percent of carbon monoxide, which has the property when inhaled of combining with the hemoglobin of the blood to form a stable compound known as carboxyhemoglobin. Carboxyhemoglobin is far more stable than the compound of oxygen and hemoglobin formed in the course of the respiratory process. In some fifteen minutes the hemoglobin combines with carbon monoxide to form a stable compound and is no longer capable of serving as an oxygen carrier. The victim begins gasping for air, but no oxygen reaches the suffocating organism; the heart beats as if ready to burst, driving blood into the lungs, but the poisoned blood can no longer assimilate the oxygen in the air. Breathing becomes hoarse, all the symptoms of painful strangulation appear, consciousness dims, and the victim perishes just as if he had been strangled.

The second method, and one that was the most widely used, was pumping air out of the chambers with suction pumps until the victims

were dead. As in the case of the first method, death was caused by depriving the victims of oxygen.

The third method, used less but nevertheless used, was murder with steam. This method, too, aimed at depriving the organism of oxygen, for the steam was used to expel the air from the chambers.

Diverse poisons, too, were employed, but this was experimentation; the first two were the methods generally used for mass murder on industrial scale.

Thus, the work of the Treblinka conveyor was so designed, as to enable the beasts to deprive man successively of all the rights and privileges he had enjoyed throughout the ages.

First they robbed him of freedom, home and country, and took him to a nameless bit of wasteland set in the midst of forests. Then they took his personal effects, his letters, photographs of his near ones, and after that, on the other side of the fence, they took away his mother, his wife, his child. They stripped him naked, took away his documents and flung them carelessly aside; in doing so they deprived him of his name. They drove him into a narrow passage with a low brick ceiling and thus robbed him at once of the sky, the stars, the wind and the sun.

Then came the last act in the human tragedy, when the man passed through the last gate of the Treblinka hell. The doors of the concrete chamber clanged to behind him. These doors were held fast by a combined lock consisting of a massive bolt, a chain and a hook. There was no breaking down of this door.

Can we overcome our horror and try to imagine how the people in these chambers felt during the last minutes of their lives?... Packed together so tightly that bones cracked and crushed chests could not expand to breathe, they stood there, one mass of humanity, covered with the clammy sweat of imminent death. Someone, with the wisdom of age perhaps, may have conquered his own fear sufficiently to say to the others: "Take heart, this is the end." Someone no doubt shouted a terrible curse.... Those curses must come true! We can picture some mother making a superhuman effort to obtain a whit more breathing space for her child in order that his last anguished gasps might be alleviated if only by one-millionth by this last evidence of maternal solicitude. We can hear some young girl, her tongue turning to lead, ask piteously: "But why are they suffocating me, why?"

What visions passed before the glassy eyes of the victims as their heads spun and their breath was stifled in their bodies? Their childhood, the happy days of peace, the last painful journey. Someone may have remembered the leering face of the SS man on the station square and thought: "So that is why he laughed!" The brain swam, consciousness faded and the last moment of terrible agony came....

No, it is impossible to imagine what took place in that chamber.... The dead bodies stood pressed close together, growing colder and colder. The children, witnesses maintain, clung to life longer than the adults. Within twenty to twenty-five minutes Schmitt's assistants would peer through the peepholes. The time had come to open the doors to the platforms. Urged on by the SS men, prisoners in overalls set about emptying the chambers. Since the floor sloped toward the platforms, many of the corpses rolled out by themselves. People who worked here told me that the faces of the corpses were yellow and that about seventy percent bled slightly at the nose and the mouth. Physiologists can no doubt explain this.

SS men inspected the bodies exchanging remarks as they did so. If a groan or a slight movement showed that life still lingered, revolver shots snuffed it out at once. Then came teams of men armed with dental pincers to extract all gold or platinum teeth from the mouths of the corpses. These teeth were sorted out according to value, packed in boxes and sent to Germany. There is no doubt that had it been convenient or advantageous for the SS to extract the teeth from living people, they would have done so with no compunction, but evidently it was simpler to extract the teeth from corpses.

The bodies were loaded in waggonettes and hauled to huge common graves, where they were laid in rows packed close together. The pit would not be filled in yet.

While the gas chambers were being emptied out, the Scharführer working on "transport" received a brief order over the phone. Thereupon he blew his whistle and the locomotive engineer shunted the next twenty cars up to the platform with the dummy station of Ober-Majdan. Another three or four thousand people carrying suitcases, bundles and packages of food alighted and walked to the station square. Mothers carried infants in their arms; the older children pressed close to their mothers' skirts, staring curiously about them. There was something frightening about the square tramped down by

so many millions of human feet. Why did the railway line end just beyond the station in a stretch of sere grass and a six-metre barbed-wire fence?...

The whole gruesome business was timed perfectly so that the new victims started up the "road from which there is no return" at the very moment when the last corpses were being hauled to the ditches from the gas chambers. And the ditches stood open, waiting....

And the camp commandant seated in his office amid heaps of papers and charts would telephone to Treblinka station. Another sixty-car train under a strong SS escort armed with light machine-guns and automatic rifles pulled heavily out of a siding and crawled to the narrow-gauge track running between the two rows of pine trees.

The huge excavators operated day and night, digging huge dark ditches hundreds of metres long and many metres deep. And the ditches stood open. They were waiting. They did not wait long.

II

AT THE END of the winter of 1943 Himmler came to Treblinka escorted by a group of important Gestapo officials. Himmler and his party landed by plane near the camp and drove in two cars through the main entrance. Most of the visitors wore army uniforms. A few, evidently experts of some kind, wore civilian clothes, fur coats and hats.

Himmler inspected the camp in person and one of the people who saw him told us that the minister of death walked over to one of the huge ditches and stared into it for a long time. Those who accompanied him stood at a respectful distance waiting while Heinrich Himmler contemplated the colossal grave already half-filled with corpses. Treblinka was the Himmler firm's biggest factory.

The SS Reichsführer left the camp the same day. Before his departure Himmler issued an order to the camp command that dumbfounded them all—Hauptsturmführer Baron von Pfein; his assistant Korol, and Captain Franz. The order was to proceed immediately to burn all the buried corpses, every single one of them, and to carry the ashes and residue out of the camp and strew them over the fields and roads. Inasmuch as there were already millions of corpses in the ground this seemed an incredibly difficult task. Moreover, the freshly killed victims were not to be buried, but burned at once.

What was the reason for Himmler's visit of inspection and his peremptory personal order? There was only one reason—the Red Army's victory at Stalingrad. The power of the Russian blow on the Volga must have been smashing indeed if a few days after it was delivered Berlin began to think of responsibility and retribution, if Himmler flew to Treblinka in person and issued orders calculated to hide the traces of the crimes committed within sixty kilometres of Warsaw. Such was the repercussion of the mighty blow the Russians dealt the Germans on the Volga.

At first there was considerable trouble with the cremation; the bodies would not burn. True, it was observed that the bodies of the women burned better. Large quantities of gasolene and oil were used up, but this was expensive and in any case the effect was insignificant. Things began to look serious, when there arrived from Germany a thickset SS man of about fifty, an expert in his line.

One cannot but marvel at the experts begotten by the Hitler regime—there were expert baby killers, expert stranglers, expert gas chamber designers and experts who specialized in the scientifically organized destruction of large cities in the course of a single day. So, too, an expert specializing in exhuming and burning millions of human bodies was found.

Under his direction they began to build furnaces. These were a special type of furnace, for neither the Lublin furnaces nor those of the largest crematorium in the world could ever have handled such a gigantic number of corpses in so short a time as was required at Treblinka.

The excavator dug a pit 250-300 m. long, 20-25 m. wide and 6 m. deep. Three rows of evenly spaced reinforced concrete pillars 100-120 cm. high were installed across the length of the pit to support steel beams that were laid along them. Rails were then laid crosswise across these beams at intervals of five to seven centimetres. The result was the grating of a titanic firebox. A new narrow-gauge railway was laid from the burial pits to the furnace pit. Soon afterwards a second and then a third furnace of like dimensions were built. Each of these furnaces took 3,500 to 4,000 corpses at a loading.

Another huge excavator arrived, followed soon afterward by a third. Work went on day and night. People who took part in the work of cremating the corpses say that the ovens resembled volcanoes; the frightful heat seared the faces of the workers, the flames

leapt up to a height of eight to ten metres, clouds of thick black smoke reached the sky and hung in a heavy motionless blanket in the air. Inhabitants of the neighbouring villages saw the flame at night from a distance of thirty and forty kilometres as it curled above the pine woods surrounding the camp. The stench of burning flesh poisoned the whole countryside. When the wind blew in the direction of the Polish camp three kilometres away, the people there were almost asphyxiated by the frightful odour. More than 800 prisoners (which is more than the number of workers in the blast-furnace or open-hearth departments of big iron and steel plants) were engaged in burning the corpses. This monster workshop operated day and night for eight months without let up, but it could not cope with the millions of buried bodies. True, new batches of victims continued to arrive all the time, which added to the load on the furnaces.

Trainloads were brought in from Bulgaria. The SS and the guards were delighted, for these people, deceived both by the Germans and the Bulgarian fascist government, and totally unaware of the fate awaiting them, brought large quantities of valuables, good food and white bread with them. Later trains began to come in from Grodno and Białystok, then from the rebellious Warsaw ghetto; trainloads of insurgent Polish peasants, workers and soldiers arrived. From Bessarabia came a group of Gypsies, 200 men and 800 women and children. They came on foot with their caravans; they too had been deceived and that is why two guards were able to bring 1,000 people, the guards themselves having no idea they were leading them to their death. Witnesses say that the Gypsy women clapped their hands in delight at the sight of the handsome building of the death house and up to the last minute had no inkling of what awaited them, a fact which amused the Germans tremendously.

The SS men subjected the group of rebels from the Warsaw ghetto to especially vicious torture. They picked out the women and children and took them not to the gas chambers but to the cremation ovens. They forced the mothers, half crazed with terror, to lead their children between the red-hot bars on which thousands of dead bodies writhed and squirmed from the heat, twisting and turning as though alive; where the bellies of dead women with child burst open from the heat and still-born infants burned up inside rent wombs. This spectacle was enough to rob the strongest man of his reason, but the

Germans knew that its effect would be a thousand times more terrible on a mother who was frantically trying to shield the eyes of her children from the ghastly sight while they shrieked in terror: "Mama, mama, what are they going to do to us? Will they burn us?" There were no such scenes in Dante's inferno.

After they had amused themselves sufficiently with this spectacle, the Germans actually did throw the children into the flames.

It is painful even to read about all this. The reader must believe me when I say that it is even more painful to write about it. "Why write then?" someone might say. "What is the use of recalling all this?"

It is the duty of a writer to tell the truth however gruelling, and the duty of the reader to learn the truth. To turn aside, or to close one's eyes to the truth is to insult the memory of the dead. The person who does not learn the whole truth will never understand what kind of enemy, what sort of monster, our great Red Army is waging battle against to the death.

The "infirmary" was also rearranged. At first all the sick were carried out to a fenced-off clearing where they were met by a so-called doctor and murdered. The bodies of the aged and sick who had been murdered were then conveyed on stretchers to the common graves. Now a round pit was dug and a grating laid at the bottom for the burning of corpses. Around the pit low benches like seats in a sports stadium were placed so close to the edge that anyone sitting on them was literally suspended over the edge of the pit. The sick and feeble who were taken into the "infirmary" were led to these benches facing the bonfire built of human bodies. After enjoying the situation to the full, the Nazi barbarians then proceeded to shoot at the grey heads and bent backs of the old people, who fell, dead or wounded, into the blazing fire.

We never had a very high opinion of the German brand of humour. It was always far too heavy for our taste. But who could ever have conceived of anything like the sense of humour, the amusements, the practical jokes of the SS men at Treblinka?

The SS held football matches with teams made up of condemned men, forced the victims to play tag, organized a chorus of the doomed. Next to the German dormitories was a menagerie where wolves, foxes and other comparatively harmless beasts of the forests were kept in cages while the most ferocious wild beasts the world

had ever produced walked the earth freely, sat on benches and listened to music. They actually wrote a Treblinka hymn for the doomed unfortunates which included the following lines:

Für uns gibt's heute nur Treblinka,
*Das unser Schicksal ist.**

A few minutes before their death bleeding, tormented people were forced to sing idiotic German sentimental songs:

... Ich brach das Blümelein
Und schenkte es dem schönsten
*Geliebten Mägdelein.***

The camp's chief commandant selected a few children from one batch of prisoners, killed their parents, dressed up the children in fine clothes, fed them with sweets, played with them, and a few days later, when he was bored with them, ordered them to be killed.

One of the chief sources of entertainment were the night orgies of violence against young and beautiful women and girls who were selected from every group of victims. The next morning the rapers personally escorted their victims to the lethal chambers. This was how the SS, the bulwark of the Hitler regime, the pride of fascist Germany, amused themselves at Treblinka.

It must be noted here that these creatures were by no means robots who mechanically carried out the wishes of others. All witnesses speak of a trait common to all of them, namely, a fondness for theoretical argument, a predilection for philosophizing. All of them had a weakness for delivering speeches to the doomed people, for boasting in front of their victims and explaining the "lofty" meaning and "importance" for the future of what was being done in Treblinka. They were profoundly and sincerely convinced that they were doing the correct and necessary thing. They explained in detail the superiority of their race over all other races; they delivered tirades about German blood, the German character and the German mission. Their beliefs were set down in books by Hitler and Rosenberg, in pamphlets and articles by Goebbels.

After a day of "work" and amusements such as those described above, they slept the sleep of the just, undisturbed by dreams or

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* *There is only Treblinka for us today—that is our fate.*
** *I plucked a flower and gave it to the loveliest of beloved maidens.*

nightmares. Their conscience never worried them for the simple reason that they had no conscience. They went in for physical exercises, took great care of their health, drank milk every morning, were extremely fussy about their personal comforts, planted flowers in front of their homes and built summer-houses. Several times a year they went home to Germany on leave since their particular "profession" was considered "injurious" and their superiors jealously guarded their health. At home they walked about proudly, and if they did not talk about their work it was not because they were ashamed of it, but simply because, being disciplined, they did not dare to violate the solemn pledge to silence they had taken. And when they went arm-in-arm with their wives to the cinema of an evening and laughed loudly, stamping with their hobnailed boots on the floor in delight, it was hard to tell them apart from the average German man in the street. Yet these were beasts in the most literal meaning of the word.

The summer of 1943 was exceptionally hot in these regions. There was not a drop of rain, not a cloud, not a puff of wind for many weeks. The burning of bodies proceeded at top speed. For nearly six months the furnaces had been going day and night, but little more than half of the dead had been cremated.

The fearful moral and physical suffering began to tell on the prisoners whose job it was to burn the corpses. Between fifteen and twenty of them committed suicide every day. Many deliberately courted death by violating disciplinary rules. "To get a bullet was a luxury," a baker from Kosow who had escaped from the camp told me. It was said that to be doomed to live in Treblinka was a hundred times worse than to be doomed to death.

Charred bones and ashes were carried outside the camp grounds. Peasants from the village of Wulka were mobilized by the Germans to load the ashes on carts and strew it along the road leading from the death camp to the Polish labour camp. Child prisoners threw shovelfuls of ashes onto the road from the carts. Sometimes they would find melted gold coins or gold dental crowns among the ashes. These juvenile prisoners were called the "children from the black road," because the ashes made the road black as a mourning ribbon. Car wheels made a peculiar swishing sound as they rolled over this road. When I travelled this way I kept hearing that mournful swoosh, coming from beneath the wheels like a low, timid plaint.

The peasants carted the charred bones and ashes from the spring of 1943 until the summer of 1944. Every day twenty carts went out, each one making six or eight trips in the course of the day. In every load went 100-125 kilograms of ashes and charred bones.

In the "Treblinka" song the Germans forced the eight hundred corpse-burners to sing were words exhorting the prisoners to humbleness and obedience in reward for which they were promised "a tiny bit of happiness which passes in a flash." Surprisingly enough there actually was one happy day in the Treblinka inferno. The Germans, however, were mistaken: neither obedience nor humility gave that day to the Treblinka doomed. It was the reckless courage of the brave that brought it into being.

They had nothing to lose. They were all doomed, every day of their lives was hell. Not one of the witnesses of the frightful crimes would have been spared. The gas chamber awaited them one and all; in fact most of them were killed after working for a few days and replaced by new workers from the current groups of victims. Only a few dozen men lived weeks and months instead of days and hours. These were skilled workers, carpenters, stone-masons, or the bakers, tailors and barbers who served the Germans. It was they who formed a committee of revolt. Only condemned men, only men possessed by an all-consuming hatred and a fierce thirst for revenge could have conceived such a mad plan of revolt. They did not want to escape before destroying Treblinka. And they destroyed it.

Weapons—axes, knives, truncheons—began to appear in the workers' barracks. At what a price, at what a tremendous risk was each axe and knife procured! What incredible patience, cunning and skill was required to hide all this from the Argus eyes of the guards! The workers laid in stocks of gasolene to use for setting fire to the camp buildings. How did this gasolene accumulate and how did it disappear without trace as if it had evaporated into thin air? By superhuman effort, great mental strain, will power and fierce daring. A tunnel was then dug underneath the German arsenal building. Here again sheer daring worked miracles; the god of courage was on their side. Twenty hand grenades, a machine gun, rifles and pistols were carried out of the arsenal and secreted in hiding places known to the conspirators alone. The latter divided themselves into groups of five. The extraordinarily complex plan for the uprising was worked out to the minutest detail. Every group had its definite assignment. And,

each of these mathematically perfect assignments was a piece of sheer madness in itself.

One group was given the task of storming the watch towers, where the guards sat behind machine guns. Other groups were to attack the sentries on duty at the entrances to the camp grounds. Others were to tackle the armoured cars, to cut telephone communications, to attack the barracks, to cut passages through the barbed wire, to lay bridges across the anti-tank ditches, to pour gasolene on the camp buildings, to set fire to them and to destroy everything that lent itself easily to destruction.

The plan even provided for the supply of money to the escaped prisoners. A Warsaw doctor who collected the money nearly gave the whole show away. One day a Scharführer noticed a fat bundle of banknotes sticking out of his pocket—it was the current sum the doctor had intended to hide. The Scharführer pretended not to have noticed it and reported the matter to Franz. Franz decided to question the doctor himself. He suspected something immediately. Why should a doomed man need money? Franz proceeded to cross-examine his victim with calm deliberation; he was convinced no person on earth could equal him in torturing a victim. But the Warsaw doctor outwitted the SS Hauptmann. He took poison. One of the participants in the uprising told me that never in Treblinka had such efforts been made to save a man's life. Evidently Franz realized that the dying doctor would carry his secret with him. But the German poison worked well and the secret remained unrevealed.

Toward the end of July the heat became unbearable. Steam issued from the graves when they were opened as from gigantic boilers. The terrific stench and the heat of the furnaces killed men who toiled on the burning of the corpses. They dropped dead, falling headlong into the blazing furnace. Thousands of millions of fat-bellied flies crawled along the ground or filled the air with their monotonous drone. The last hundred thousand corpses were being burned.

The uprising was scheduled for August 2. A revolver shot was its signal. Fortune favoured the sacred cause of the rebels. A new flame leapt skywards, not the thick heavy black smoke and flame of burning bodies, but the bright, hot and dancing flame of a conflagration. The camp buildings flared up and to the rebels it seemed that the sun had rent itself asunder and was burning over Treblinka. a symbol of the triumph of freedom and honour.

Shots rang out and the machine guns on the towers captured by the rebels emitted a jubilant rat-tat-tat. The explosions of hand grenades sounded as triumphant as the clapping of the bell of Truth itself. The air shook from the detonations; buildings came crashing down, and the whistling of bullets deadened the odious buzzing of the carrion flies. Axes dripping blood flashed in the clear, pure air. On this day, August 2, the soil of the Treblinka hell was soaked with the evil blood of the SS men, and the radiant sky was tremulous with the triumph of this moment of vengeance.

And here history repeated itself: As had happened in similar instances ever since the world began the creatures who had strutted as members of a higher race, who had thundered forth "*Achtung, Müzen ab!*", the creatures who had shouted for the people of Warsaw to come out of their houses to their death with the shattering compelling voices of master, "*Alle r-r-r-aus! Unter-r-r-r-r,*" these creatures so confident of their power when it was a question of executing millions of women and children, showed themslves to be despicable cowards, miserable belly-crawling worms begging for mercy when it came to a real life-and-death struggle. They lost their heads, rushed hither and thither like frightened rats; they forgot all about the diabolically conceived system of defences Treblinka boasted. But is there really anything surprising about that, after all?

Two and a half months later, October 14, 1943, there was an uprising in the Sobibór death factory, organized by a Soviet war prisoner from Rostov, a political officer, Sashko Pechersky. And there the same thing was repeated as happened at Treblinka—half dead from starvation the people nevertheless proved able to cope with the hundreds of SS scoundrels bloated with the blood of their innocent victims. Wielding home-made axes forged in the camp smithies the rebels got the better of the executioners; many of them were "armed" with fine sand, with which Sashko had instructed them to fill their pockets beforehand for use in blinding the sentries.... But is there really anything surprising about that, after all?

When Treblinka was enveloped in flames, and the rebels, bidding a silent farewell to the ashes of their fellow prisoners, left the barbed-wire compound, SS and police units were sent in pursuit. Hundreds of police dogs were set on their trail. The Germans brought out aircraft to hunt down the escaped prisoners. Battles were fought in the forests and marshes and few of the rebels lived to tell the tale.

Treblinka ceased to exist on August 2. The Germans completed the burning of the remaining corpses, dismantled the brick buildings, removed the barbed wire, set fire to the wooden barracks that had survived the mutiny. The equipment of the death factory was blown up or dismantled and shipped away; the furnaces were destroyed, the excavators taken away and the huge innumerable ditches filled in with earth. The station building was razed to the last brick; the railway track and even the ties were removed. Lupine was planted on the site of the camp and a settler named Straben built himself a house there. The house is no longer there, for it has been burnt down since.

What was the object of all this destruction? Was it to hide the traces of the murder of millions of people in the hell of Treblinka? But how did they expect to do this? Did they really think it possible to force the thousands who had witnessed the death trains moving from all corners of Europe to the death conveyor to keep silent? Did they believe they could hide that deadly flame and the smoke which hung for eight months in the sky, visible by day and by night to the inhabitants of dozens of villages and small towns? Did they think they could make the peasants of the Wulka village forget the fearful shrieks of the women and children which lasted for thirteen long months and which seem to ring in their ears to this very day? Did they imagine they could compel the peasants who had strewn the roads with human ashes for a whole year to keep silent? Did they imagine that they could compel to silence the survivors who had seen the Treblinka slaughterhouse in operation from its inception until August 2, 1943, the last day of its existence; the witnesses who have given accurate and corroborated accounts of every SS man and guard; witnesses who, step by step, have helped to reproduce a faithful picture of life in Treblinka from day to day? These can no longer be ordered: "*Mützen ab!*", these can no longer be led off to the lethal chamber. And Himmler no longer has power over these henchmen of his who with bowed heads and fingers that tug nervously at the edges of their jackets recount in dull toneless voices the delirium-like story of their crimes.

A Soviet officer wearing the green ribbon of the Stalingrad Medal takes down page after page of the assassins' depositions. At the door stands a sentry, his lips pressed tight. The same Stalingrad Medal hangs on his chest. His gaunt, weather-beaten face is grim. It is the face of popular justice. How symbolical it is, actually, that one of

the victorious Stalingrad armies has come here to Treblinka, near Warsaw! It was not for nothing that Heinrich Himmler rushed to Treblinka by plane in February 1943, not for nothing that he ordered furnaces to be built and the traces to be burned and wiped out. No, it was to no purpose that he hurried so! The Stalingrad fighters came to Treblinka; the road from the Volga to the Vistula proved short. Now the very soil of Treblinka refuses to be an accomplice in the crime, in the atrocities that have been committed, and it spews forth the bones and the belongings of the murdered victims, whom the Hitlerites so vainly tried to hide in its depths.

We arrived at the Treblinka camp early in September, thirteen months after the day of the uprising. For thirteen months the slaughterhouse had been in operation. For thirteen months the Germans had endeavoured to hide the traces of its work.

It was quiet. The tops of the pines flanking the railway track barely stirred. Millions of human eyes had stared out of the carriage windows at these pines, this sand, this old tree stump, as the train pulled slowly into the platform. The ashes and crushed slag on the black road lined in neat German fashion with whitewashed stones swished softly.

We enter the camp. We are treading the soil of Treblinka. The lupine pods burst open at the slightest touch, burst open by themselves with a faint popping sound; millions of tiny peas roll on the ground. The rattle of the falling peas, the popping sound of the bursting pods merge into a soft, mournful melody like a funeral dirge—faint, sorrowful, gentle—issuing from the bowels of the earth. The soil, rich and juicy as though linseed oil had been poured on it, the fathomless earth of Treblinka, as oozy as the sea bottom, gives under your feet. This plot of land fenced off with barbed wire has consumed more human lives than all the oceans and seas in the world ever since the birth of mankind.

The earth ejects crushed bones, teeth, bits of paper and clothing; it refuses to keep its awful secret. These things emerge from the unhealed wounds in the earth. There they are—the half-rotted shirts of the slain, the trousers, shoes, tarnished cigarette-cases, the tiny cogwheels of watches, penknives, shaving brushes, candlesticks, children's shoes with red pompons, towels with Ukrainian embroidery, lace underwear, scissors, thimbles, corsets, trusses. Out of another fissure in the earth crawl heaps of utensils: cups, pots, basins, tins,

pans, aluminium mugs, bowls, children's bakelite cups.... And beyond, out of the bottomless, swollen earth, as though pushed forward into the light of day by some invisible hand, emerge half-rotted Soviet passports, notebooks with Bulgarian writing, photographs of children from Warsaw and Vienna, letters written in childish scrawl, a volume of poetry, a prayer copied on a yellowed fragment of paper, food ration coupons from Germany.... Hundreds of perfume bottles of all shapes and sizes, green, pink, blue.... Pervading everything is the nauseating stench of corruption, a stench that neither fire nor sunshine, rain, snow or wind have been able to overcome. And hundreds of tiny forest flies swarm over the decaying fragments of clothing and paper.

We walk over the bottomless Treblinka earth and suddenly something causes us to halt in our tracks. It is the sight of a lock of hair gleaming like burnished copper, the soft lovely hair of a young girl trampled into the ground, and next to it a lock of light blonde hair, and farther on a thick dark braid gleaming against the light sand; and beyond that more and more. These are evidently the contents of one, but only one, of the sacks of hair the Germans had neglected to ship off.

Then it is all true! The last wild hope that it might be a ghastly nightmare has gone. The lupine pods pop open, the tiny peas beat a faint tattoo as though a myriad of tiny bells were really ringing a funeral dirge deep down under the ground. And it seems the heart must surely burst under the weight of sorrow, grief and pain that is beyond human endurance.

Scientists, sociologists, criminologists, psychiatrists and philosophers are puzzling over this phenomenon. What is it—innate or hereditary, is it the result of upbringing, environment, external influences, is it predetermined by history or is it the criminal will of the leaders? What is it, how did it come to pass? The embryonic traits of the race theory which sounded so comical when expounded by second-rate pseudo-professors or the puny provincial theoreticians of last-century Germany, the contempt of the German philistine for the Russian, the Pole, the Jew, the French, the British, the Greek and the Czech, the whole of this cheap and tawdry German superiority over the rest of mankind that was good-naturedly laughed off by journalists and humorists, was suddenly in the course of a few years transformed from mere childish babble into a deadly menace to

mankind, a menace to life and freedom and became the source of incredible and unparalleled suffering, bloodshed and crime. There is definite food for thought here.

Wars like the present are terrible indeed. Rivers of innocent blood have been spilt by the Germans. But today it is not enough to speak of the responsibility of Germany for what has happened. Today we must speak of the responsibility of all nations and of every citizen in the world for the future.

Every man and woman today is in duty bound to his conscience, to his son and his mother, to his country and to mankind to examine his heart and conscience and reply to the question: what is it that gave rise to racism, what can be done in order that Nazism, Hitlerism may never rise again, either on this or the other side of the ocean, never unto eternity.

The imperialist idea of national, race, or any other exceptionalism led the Hitlerites logically to Majdanek, Sobibór, Bełzec, Oświęcim and Treblinka.

We must remember that racism, fascism will emerge from this war not only with bitter recollections of defeat but also with sweet memories of the ease with which it is possible to slaughter millions of defenceless people.

This must be solemnly borne in mind by all who value honour, liberty and the life of all nations, of all mankind.

THE ROAD TO THE BORDER

I

THE TROOPS are travelling faster than my messages along the wires. The events of the morning, which seemed so uncommonly important, are thrown in the shade by the events of the afternoon; and the evening brings fresh tidings of liberated villages and towns, of captured generals and officers, of the advance of our forces. Only a few days ago I wrote that Bobruisk lay behind us and that we were not so far from Minsk. Today, we have left Minsk and Negoreloye, and Stolbtsy, which the Germans reduced to ashes, and the lovely little town of Novogrudok far behind in the east. Our car has splashed its way over a half-submerged plank bridge across the upper reaches of the Niemen. The clear waters of this river, which look brown because of the coarse dark sand of its bed, flow north. This is the first river we crossed in our offensive that flows from south to north, into the Baltic Sea. And now the Niemen, too, lies scores of kilometres behind. Our car moves on along paved roads and highways, under spreading roadside maples and lindens, through smoking towns and villages which the Germans have put to the torch. And everywhere we are preceded by our great infantry, and the clatter of heavy machine guns.

The strip of Soviet territory still held by the enemy is growing narrower all the time. Battles are raging in the areas where we fought the invading German fascist troops in the late June and early July of 1941.

The great day is approaching, the day when the whole of Soviet territory will be free. The chiefs of police, the burgomasters, the traitor *wojts* who have constantly been withdrawing to the west with the rear of the German army have today crawled over the border into East Prussia like a swarm of scorpions, vipers and locusts, driven out of our territory. The barking of the German propagandists is now radioed from kennels that have been hastily removed to Germany. The great day that sees the liberation of all the Soviet peoples and all Soviet territory will be followed by a second historic day, when the liberating army, the avenging army, our great Red Army, launches its attack on the German border. In these days of joy and triumph, the Red Army bears a tremendous responsibility to the people, and the people bear a tremendous responsibility to the Red Army. In

these days and hours every one of us, every Soviet man and woman, must remember that each new kilometre sliced from the distance to our border calls upon us to strain every nerve, to be prepared for all conceivable perfidy on the part of the fascist gangsters.

In these days there must not be even the shadow of complacency. The slightest carelessness, the slightest thoughtlessness at the front or in the rear were criminal last year. Today they are trebly criminal, trebly impermissible. That is the thought, that is the sentiment that must permeate our Red Army, from the top generals to the rank-and-file soldiers—infantrymen, sappers, scouts. That is the thought that must permeate the war effort of our people in the rear, from the managers of giant tank and aeroplane plants to rank-and-file smelters and blast furnace apprentices.

II

WE HAVE covered over four hundred kilometres with our advancing troops in the past few weeks. The division with which I set out is now far beyond the Niemen. From the upper reaches of the Dnieper to the upper reaches of the Niemen our road lay through dense mixed forests, through fields of rye, wheat and barley, across sandy soil and yellow wastes of clay, over flowering hills, through shady valleys, along rivers, brooks, and rills that glistened in the light of sun and moon, and down the streets of burning towns and cities. Never, in all the three years of war, have advancing troops had to cope with such dust. The dust was never so thick or so penetrating either in the Ukraine in 1941, or even in the steppes of the Don and Stalingrad Regions in the summer of 1942. There are moments when the cars have to slow down and stop because of the yellow fog that blots out the bright sunlight so that it is impossible to see more than a few yards ahead. The dust swirls up in yellow clouds like the smoke of a tremendous conflagration, as though the earth were ablaze. Yes, the earth is really on fire!

Dry forests set on fire by shells burn with a heavy red flame, and the acrid blue and white smoke merges with the yellow dust of the forest roads. It is often hard to breathe, and eyes become bloodshot and inflamed with the dust and smoke. Yet high up in the skies the white-hot sun of July shines. The sky has been cloudless for several days.

After the mud of the winter offensive, many longed for that scourge of warfare—dust. But now their song is: Oh, for some rain and some mud! Anything rather than dust!

When the offensive began and the first shells went over, the grain was still green in the fields. Today the ears are full, and the stalks have grown yellow, streaked with copper and gold. People look about in glad surprise. Such a short time ago, only one month past, the grain was still young and green, and our forces were on the Dnieper and the Drut.... It is hard to fight under the merciless sun, in the smoke of burning forests and villages, in the dust of sixteen-hour marches. But our men are in high spirits. Singing is often heard through the dust, and the strains of trophy accordions resound from passing cars and the jolting waggons of regimental baggage trains. Only on the road does one really understand why the accordion is the true instrument for the soldier at war. No other instrument could be played in a truck jolting over bumpy roads, or in a cart rumbling over cobblestones. The *balalaika* would fall silent, and so would the trumpet. But the accordion player is never bothered by the bumps. Down goes the truck into a rut, and everything in it flies into the air—fuel drums, boxes of hardtack and the knapsacks of the men sitting on top of the load. But the accordion, tossed up together with its player, emits such a jolly, rousing trill that everyone on the road grins and looks round to see where the sound comes from. And you can be sure that anything funny is appreciated here, and the laughter that follows a good joke is of the heartiest.

During a brief halt, the men lie down to rest in the shade of a tree. A liaison man named Skvortsov comes riding up—a short, pock-marked fellow, one of the veterans of the division who has been in the fiercest and bloodiest battles of this war. He is mounted on a big German horse and a German tommy gun is slung over his chest. He is just itching to laugh. Like all really witty people, Skvortsov keeps the straightest of faces in telling the funniest stories. This peasant knows the elements of the comical no worse than the world's best humorists. Skvortsov has been corresponding with three women in the rear. One of them, he says, has bought a cow for him; the second bought him a gold watch; and the third—a new suit, only the wrong size. Then he begins debating with himself aloud as to which of the three he should marry. In a few minutes he has everyone listening to him, including the author of these lines, convulsed with laughter, so

comic are the weigthy arguments he presents "for" and "against." Yet he is not making fun of his would-be fiancées. On the contrary, he speaks of them with the most genuine respect and the utmost gratitude for their letters.

Sweeping his audience with his eyes, he finally remarks to a girl in Red Army uniform:

"You see how things are, Raya. We're all booked up in the rear, and you poor girls'll get left when the war's over. Chasing after stars on your shoulder-straps! I'm sorry for you—honest to God, I am!"

The girls giggle.

Skvortsov whips up his horse, but it refuses to budge.

"Get a move on, Frau!" he shouts. "Get a move on! I'll teach you to fight for liberty!..."

And he disappears into the dust. The men look after him, exclaiming:

"What a fellow! Good egg, Skvortsov!"

Their bloodshot eyes have been cleared by their laughter, as though bathed in fresh, cold water.

In general I must say that a joke at the front, a cheery word, laughter, song are all big things, unusually important and necessary. They all testify to the spirit of victory among the men who are getting the best of enemy fire, enervating heat, dust and long route marches.

But I must say frankly that in this campaign we never once came across any of the men dancing; that is a bit too much for tired feet.

An hour later the men move on. Their eyes are heavy, their faces grim and stern, as they watch the flaming villages. Such is the soul of our people, in which inexorable resolution goes hand in hand with a ready smile.

III

IN THESE PAST weeks I have visited many towns in liberated Byelorussia on the day of their liberation or the day after. Bobruisk, Minsk, Stolbtsy, Novogrudok, Baranovichi.... I have been in the Polish towns of Lublin, Siedlec, Chelm, Biala-Podlaska....

Last year, during our offensive in the Ukraine, I saw Glukhov, Bakhmach, Nezhin, Kozelets, Chernigov, Yagotin, Korostyshev, Zhitomir, immediately after their liberation. I saw Odessa and Orel in the smoke and flame of the first day of freedom.

I have been in other towns several weeks after they were liberated: Voroshilovgrad, Kiev, Kharkov, Novograd-Volynsk, Rovno, Lutsk, Krivoi Rog....

And everywhere, everywhere, in the smoke and flame of Orel and Minsk, in the chilly ruins and grass-grown streets of Gomel, in the cold ashes of Voronezh, I read the frightful scroll of the crimes of German fascism. The nearer we get to the border, the more voluminous this scroll inscribed with the blood of millions of children and old folk—inscribed by the light of conflagrations, to the accompaniment of the groans and shrieks of the executed and the gasps of victims buried alive. For three years the Hitlerites indulged in crimes and atrocities on Byelorussian soil the like of which has never before been known in human history.

Minsk was an appalling sight. It was a city of prisons and concentration camps, bristling with barbed wire; a city fettered by the fascists; a city of fascist torture chambers; a city half dead, half demolished, drenched with blood.

In the terrible winter nights, the Germans shot down many thousands of unarmed prisoners of war in the streets of Minsk. Thousands of partisans were tortured to death in prison cells by the Gestapo, the police, the commandant's troops, the gendarmerie. Over a hundred thousand Jews were killed in Minsk in the course of two years—women, children, and the aged; workers, engineers, doctors, office employees. The executioners had mercy for none, not for feeble old ladies, or women in childbed, or new-born babes. They killed their victims by city blocks. They killed them by ages. They killed them by trades. They killed them all. Every kilometre of our march to the border adds to the terrible record.

There is not a village, there is not a town, that has no victims of the Germans to mourn.

During the fight for one village, a seventy-five-year-old Byelorussian pleaded with our Colonel to take him into his regiment.

"They killed my whole family," he repeated, over and over again. "They killed them all. Give me a gun."

A few days later, near a wood that was still in the hands of the Germans, I met another old man. His beard was tufty and unkempt, his eyes faded with age. He carried a rifle.

"Grandfather," I said, "it's time you took a rest. Why must you fight with the partisans at your age?"

"I've got to keep on," he said sadly. "The Germans killed my folks. They killed my old woman, and my daughter, and my two grandchildren. And they burned down my home."

He strode on towards a thicket crackling with tommy-gun and machine-gun fire.

From east to west, from the Volga and the Caucasian mountains, flows the river of blood and tears. From every village, from every forest hamlet, from towns and cities, come the bloody streams and rivulets to join the great torrent of the people's suffering and wrath. The sky is dark above it, for ashes and smoke have blotted out the light of sun and stars. Only the murky flame of the conflagrations that the enemy left by the Volga lights the path of the river across the steppes of the Don, through the fields around Voronezh and Kursk, through the Orel woods and the valleys of the Kiev Region and across the expanses of Volhynia.

And now there are only the last few versts to the border left. The river grows ever broader, and its frightful waters rush on with mounting speed. A deep and lasting furrow will mark the brow of the Soviet country where this river has cut its bed. A people grim and mighty has emerged from the smithy of great suffering and great struggle.

The men of evil can already hear the distant thunder of approaching vengeance.... The groans of the innocent, the blood of the murdered, the tears of the mourners have merged with the roar of our cannon, with the swift river of steel that is speeding on in mortal conflict to enemy soil. The night is coming to an end.

The day will be ours, from the very break of dawn. Let the guilty tremble!

HOW VICTORY IS FORGED

BEFORE the present offensive, the line of the Byelorussian front resembled a flying bird with its great wings spread north and south for hundreds of kilometres. The veil of secrecy has been now lifted and the day and the hour of the offensive disclosed. The whole world watched the mighty sweep of the iron-clad right wing in the latter part of June, and the sudden blow delivered by the left in the middle of July. Since that time the armoured wings of the front have covered many hundreds of kilometres. The contours of the bird have disappeared and the front has straightened out as though a terrific pressure from within has smoothed out the bulge.

Travelling by automobile and liaison planes from the extreme right to the extreme left wing of the front, a distance of almost a thousand kilometres, I had the good fortune to observe the first day of the attack on different sectors.

The first day of an offensive is always particularly interesting. It reflects more vividly than others the style, the individual peculiarities, not only in method and conception, but even in temperament, of the men who directed and carried through the preparations.

The scenes of battle were so complicated, the facts so far out of the ordinary, that they cannot possibly be conveyed in a purely empirical, photographic description. There is an urgent demand for a generalized picture and you have to ponder over our tactics and the conduct of the enemy.

The first factor working for our success was that the actual disposition of the enemy divisions, regiments and batteries corresponded in almost every detail with the maps compiled by our reconnaissance.

On the other hand, I was amazed at the consistency with which the Germans failed to guess the direction of our drives both main and secondary on every sector of the front. At points where the enemy had concentrated forces to repel the onslaught of our tanks, there was nothing to fight but small units designed to keep their forces engaged. At those points where they did not expect any serious action, however, like the wooded swampy sector manned by General Batov's troops, for example, they were dealt powerful, swift and stunning blows. I repeat: this occurred on all sectors of the front. And to cap this series of individual blunders we have the crowning blunder of Hitler's gen-

eral staff. The Germans expected that our main drive on this front would be in the south, and General Model was preparing for it. But it was Field Marshal von Busch on the central sector who received our crushing blow straight on the jaw, soon after the clairvoyant Hitler had ordered him to hand over a good number of his heavy guns to Model.

What was the reason for these blunders? Evidently the German forecasts were based on stereotyped ideas on suitability of terrain, and arithmetical conceptions of distance. They expected our offensive on the most westerly sectors of the front, those, which were most easily negotiable and closest to railway centres. Our offensive, however, developed in a way the enemy did not foresee. The inspired thinking of our command helped us to cross swamps and forests, and they became negotiable. Many kilometres of roads were laid through the green swamp-lands. Heavy tanks and big guns pushed safely through where even a light-footed scout would have sunk. It appeared that the shortest distance to the borders of "European Fortress" was not the geometrical straight line which the Germans had projected on their maps. It was a curve, a remarkable and intricate curve plotted by the analytical geometry of war—a curve that caught the armies of the German "centre" and sewed them up in the fatal triple pocket of Vitebsk, Bobruisk and Minsk.

Our preliminary artillery barrages were successful on all sectors of the front, but the methods employed were various. This is a phenomenon worthy of some study. It would seem that success attained at one point would encourage exact imitation of the methods by which it had been achieved. Once a given combination of methods has led to success, it is logical to repeat that combination a second time, and a third, and a fourth—in a word, every time the forces are faced with a problem of similar nature. The Germans, for example, rarely deviate from the stereotyped rule. Any combination of methods which has once led to success is unquestioningly repeated, and mechanically at that, in all subsequent operations. There are many dangers in such standardization, in the canonization of methods that have once proved successful. It leads to mental stagnation, to a neglect of the aspects peculiar to a concrete situation, which cannot, of course, be identical with any other; again, it allows the opposing army to work out means of combating methods which have become obvious by frequent repetition. And it was indeed a pleasure to observe the resourceful,

dynamic wealth of methods employed by our generals in breaching the German defences and their refusal to resort to stereotype.

Three generals won major victories in this offensive; each of them guided by his own personal experience; each went about it in his own way, and each inscribed a page in the golden book of victory in his own hand.

Imagine yourself in the place of an opponent who is called upon to parry blows so united in purpose and so dissimilar in execution.

Here we see a heavy barrage, systematically increasing in intensity and shifted gradually from the first line of defences to the next. It has been preceded by an equally impressive reconnaissance in force, involving considerable infantry forces and fire power. There was a lapse of several hours between the reconnaissance and the beginning of the artillery preparation. After a hundred and fifty minute barrage, big infantry forces went into attack. Such was the style of the first blow.

On the adjoining sector the breakthrough was accomplished in entirely different fashion. Powerful artillery groupings launched their fire against a few chosen sectors of the German defences. The superiority of our fire at these points was nothing short of fantastic; on one sector for example we had nineteen guns to their one. This relative strength of fire power testifies not only to our superiority in materiel, but also to our ability to outdo the enemy. Instead of blanketing the first line of trenches as had been done in the first blow our shells covered the depths of the enemy defences, where it was assumed that the troops were concentrated, having been withdrawn from the first line by way of communication trenches as soon as the barrage opened up. The brief hurricane of fire was followed by a sudden lull. In obedience to the old, established rule the enemy hastened to occupy their first line of trenches to meet the expected attack. And immediately the fire of the artillery swooped down on this first line. Then another lull ensued only to be suddenly broken by triumphant cheers coming from the enemy trenches, thunderous cheers, that shattered all conceptions of time and space. These shouting Red Army men were not the infantry the enemy had been expecting. They were assault groups, specially picked and trained, which had been secretly concentrated almost within arm's length of the German trenches.

Or take the breach on a third sector, where the style differed from both the first and the second. When the barrage began, the enemy expected a reconnaissance in force, to be followed by an offensive the

next day. Hence, they saw no need for disclosing the disposition of their artilllery by opening fire. But suddenly they saw that what they had thought to be a reconnoitring operation had developed into an actual offensive, and that after a few minutes of artillery fire their trenches were flooded by tens, and hundreds, and thousands—by an avalanche—of Soviet infantrymen.

It is not our purpose here to study the comparative merits of these methods. What we wish to emphasize is the unity of purpose and variety of method, the absence of standardization and routine and the keen initiative displayed during the first and most decisive period of the offensive.

In modern warfare the role of the divisional commander becomes exceedingly important. Contact with Army Headquarters cannot always be maintained, and important decisions that cannot be put off for a moment must be made by the divisional commander himself. On this depends the success in following up, surrounding and annihilating an enemy that has been stunned but that is capable of recovery in the course of an hour or two. The speed with which an operation as a whole is developed depends to a large extent on this.

On one of the sectors of the Byelorussian front an operation planned by the High Command was to take nine days. The command of the particular formation undertook to carry it out in seven days. Actually this operation, which consisted in breaching the enemy's defences, splitting, surrounding and wiping an enemy group out, took three days in all. It was possible to cut the time down to a third because the divisional commanders, the men who bore the entire burden, I would say, of direct, constant and clock-round leadership of the action displayed in full measure their experience and initiative, their ability in extremely complicated situations to make quick, unerring decisions enabling them to reach the objective set.

After observing the work of a commander of one of the Guards divisions while a movement was being swiftly developed I can say that the strain of this creative, military work is in no way less than the creative effort of a scientist who in solving a complicated problem combines complex mathematical calculation with the assimilation of empirical, often contradictory, data.

For a brief space of time the divisional commander has the task of directing a battle in which, in addition to his regiments, supporting artillery and self-propelled guns and Katyusha rocket guns also take

part. The problems of maintaining a supply of ammunition and fuel and of choosing the safest roads when everything is in a turmoil must also be solved.

In the course of the fighting there are counter-attacking Ferdinands to be dealt with as well as the infantry units and transport columns that are trying to get away; decisions must be taken on the immediate and simultaneous construction of bridges in one part of the river and the destruction of German bridges on parallel roads. All these decisions have to be carefully correlated with the plan of the higher command, with orders received from higher authority.

It must be remembered that this work was not done in an office, but under conditions demanding the expenditure of an enormous amount of physical energy, directly on the field in the face of grim danger and death; that it continued for dozens of hours without a minute's respite or sleep. The genuine and eternal soul of any creative activity lies in the fact that it adapts lofty, ordered ideas and plans to hard, stubborn, warring and contradictory reality. Thus, too, in warfare the plan of the High Command is subordinated to the reality of the future by the fire, death and steel of the battlefield. This is the great service rendered by the divisional commander.

To continue. In the early spring of 1943 I had a talk at the front with a certain General whose command included units, that had participated in the defence of Stalingrad, and others that had taken part in the breaching of the German lines northwest of the beleaguered city.

This General told me that he noticed a difference in style and ability between the commanders of these two groups of units. The commanders of the latter group were resolute, skilled, and strong in offensive action and in pursuit of the enemy. The commanders of the former distinguished themselves in defensive action, in repulsing powerful counter-attacks of enemy tanks and infantry. The General was worried about this narrow specialization. He told me of cases when his commanders had failed to cope with rapid changes in the situation, requiring swift transition from the offensive to the defensive, or *vice versa*. He told me how one commander, an expert at pursuing the enemy, lost his head and ordered his regiment to withdraw when a score of German tanks appeared on his flank, while at approximately the same time on an adjoining sector another regimental commander in whose blood ran the heroics of massive, protracted and practically immobile defence, failed to notice a sudden night withdrawal of the enemy and

remained stationary until morning without trying to cut off the German path of retreat and attack them on the flank.

"I have no intention," he said thoughtfully, "of encouraging these distinctive qualities. That would be a mistake. On the contrary, I am trying to train each of them in those qualities which I find he lacks."

This was almost a year and a half ago, when the front was still on the Don.

And now, in the summer of 1944, on the banks of the Drut, the Berezina, the Svisloch, and the Niemen, I watched with particular interest those commanders whose past activities had been bound up chiefly with either defensive or offensive operations.

It is indeed a wonderful synthesis in which are combined experiences gained in past actions. There was no trace of narrow specialization, of a mechanical accumulation of experience. What I observed was a higher standard of military leadership, due to the union of offensive and defensive abilities.

In mobile warfare intensive and furious defensive battles, pursuit and flanking actions and operations with open flanks may all occur in a compressed period of time. In mobile warfare a cunning enemy will at one time assume the defensive in a ramified network of trenches, and at another, beaten and surrounded, will suddenly concentrate his forces in an attempt to breach the lines, to surround the surrounders. In mobile warfare the types of action change swiftly, unexpectedly and abruptly, and it is hard to anticipate their variations. In the course of a night, a fresh division transferred from far in the rear by aircraft or trucks and prepared to counter-attack may take the place of a battered and pursued infantry unit. Enemy units that have been crushed and scattered in woods and fields may assemble again in the course of a few hours to launch a last, desperate attack and may constitute a serious obstacle to advancing forces, emerging on the road along the line of advance and attacking the flank or the rear.

The greatest skill in offensive operations would not have sufficed in this tense and intricate combined action had it not been accompanied by mastery in defence, in the best sense of that word. This combination and rapid succession of offence and defence is the very essence of mobile warfare. In the victorious period of the war our generals and lower-ranking officers and the rank-and-file underwent an examination in the art of creatively combining offensive and defensive action and came through with flying colours.

Many examples could be cited: the lightning operations of General Chuikov, who in Stalingrad was called "General Stickfast" and who had seemed an expert only in defensive fighting; the splendid work of General Batov, with his tremendous experience in every type of fighting, gained in the breach of the enemy lines at Stalingrad, the Battle of Kursk, the fight for the Dnieper; the achievements of numerous divisional and regimental commanders.

There is one incident I should like to describe—a minor one, perhaps, but instructive and highly dramatic. It concerns the 1st Battalion of the artillery regiment of a certain Guards Division, which had seen action at Orel, on the Sozh, and on the Dnieper, and which fought in the breakthrough of the German defences at the end of last June (1944).

Most of the men in this unit were Stalingrad veterans. The last few months of standstill on the defensive, too, had been reminiscent of the immobility of the Stalingrad fighting. When the German lines had been broken, however, these men were called upon to pour immediately into the breach with the infantry and the self-propelled guns. Backed by the experience gained in the swift Ukrainian offensive in the summer and fall of last year, they were well able to cope with the strenuous work that fell to their share, using their guns to support the infantry in its rapid advance. The quick change in situation did not affect the work of the guns. The ability to fight on the move had become as much an element of the gunners' work as was the five months of firing from position which had brought them fame during the fighting in the factory area of Stalingrad. Immediately at home in all conditions, the men could find their bearings on new terrain with lightning speed, rapidly select positions for fire over open sights or for mobile battle against the German Ferdinands; they proved able to organize the uninterrupted flow of ammunition, to choose convenient roads, remove enemy mines, etc.

Regimental Commander Kagramanyan gave the 1st Battalion the difficult task of rushing ahead and, fighting its way to the only highway still in the hands of the surrounded Germans, to straddle this road and cut it off with howitzer fire. The Battalion had to push their tractor-drawn guns ahead of the infantry and advance alone through districts dotted with German centres of resistance, a march that was executed successfully, and with extraordinary speed. By evening the Battalion's field guns and howitzers reached the highway, having outdone the most mobile of forces in mobility.

If I remember correctly, this was on the fourth day of the offensive. The ground was level. Behind the battalion was the highway, and to its right was a stretch of low shrubbery, growing into a wood further on. The men lay down to sleep, exhausted after several days continuous marching and fighting. The only people awake were the sentries and Frolov, the second in command, who was watching the deserted road for the return of the commander; the latter had gone for supplies of ammunition with the trucks protected by one of the field guns. The men, however, did not sleep long. "Stand by!"—came Frolov's sudden shout. The Battalion's Chief of Staff, Beskaravainy, sprang up from the groundsheet on which he had been lying. Columns of Germans were approaching from all four sides and were clearly visible in the moonlight. After all these days spent in pursuit of the enemy, the Battalion itself had now been surrounded. The Germans closed in to form a ring around the Battalion and opened fire.

Sixty-three Soviet gunners began an epic battle against a thousand Germans. The men recalled the most terrible moments of the defence of Stalingrad. Once more the battle cry rang out: "Stand to the death!" The Germans fought to gain the highway with incredible ferocity. The battle raged for seventeen hours and at some of the guns only one man was left alive. Gun commander Seleznyov, wounded in the chest and the only man left of his crew, literally crawled up to the loaded gun and fired it. Gun-layer Konkov worked his howitzer alone. Our men took seventy Germans prisoner. There were moments when the range was as close as twenty metres. And still the Germans did not break through. Twenty-four hours later, Lieutenant-Colonel Stepanov, second in command of the artillery regiment, himself came to count the German dead piled up around the Battalion that in the course of a tempestuous advance had stood to the death in a position of circular defence. He found 700 dead around the guns. Reinforcements arrived and the Battalion switched over from defence to a swift advance which gave the men no rest day or night.

It is only natural that one should draw a comparison between this synthesis and unity in our strategy and the notorious German theories of rigid and elastic defence. These two poles in the German defensive tactics were represented by "elastic Model" and "rigid von Busch," the "polar" marshals.

Model became an expert in elasticity during the period of our drive in the south. Von Busch gained fame among his colleagues as a

master of rigid defence after the fighting in the northwest. Each was regarded by the German general staff as an expert in his own field. But the hour came when the Red Army broadened the scope of each of these field marshals, and of their troops as well—the hour when both the "rigid" and the "elastic" suffered defeat. I was present at the preliminary examination of three German generals in forest shacks, when the oak leaves on their crosses were matched by the dry oak leaves left on their uniforms by the Byelorussian forests through which they had been wandering for the previous five days. Von Lützow, the best trained general of the three, already realized how fatal to the German army of the "centre" had been the narrow, dogmatic methods of the "master" of rigid defence, von Busch. Foreign to the very idea of synthesis, his mechanical principles were applied with a narrow and pedantic pig-headedness, with that purely German obstinacy that refused to take into consideration the general strategic situation, the overwhelming superiority of our tanks, our aircraft, and our artillery.

Let me cite a brief passage from the theses prepared by the German Command for a conference of divisional commanders of the army of the "centre," shortly before our offensive:

"In the opinion of the Führer, we can make no further retreats at the moment. Consequently, our positions must be held at all cost. The reverses on the southern sector of the Eastern Front are regarded by the Führer as the result of insufficient mobility in the execution of the defence assignment. . . ." And further: "There is only one possible conclusion to be drawn: our positions must be held!"

We have already seen how the Germans "held their positions." The question naturally arises: where, after the collapse of "rigid Busch," will "elastic Model" demonstrate his skill? Between the eastern and the western borders of Germany? Between the Oder and the Rhine? The open spaces seem to have been lost?

Thus, at different phases of the war, the German army has developed a number of narrow, pedantic specialists, from experts in the art of "*blitz* offensive" to experts in "elastic defence." Each in succession failed and retired from the stage when the Red Army lowered the curtain, only to raise it again on the next, and today the last, act of the war.

Our army has created, trained and steeled the highest type of general and officer, who combines in himself the creative synthesis of all

the wealth and variety of experience gained in the different forms of warfare.

Our material strength, the tremendous crushing power of our artillery fire, of our tanks and of our aircraft—the power that is breaking and suppressing German resistance—is a magnificent expression of the creative effort of the entire Soviet people. Victory would have been unthinkable without this ponderous force of Soviet fire and Soviet steel, crushing the fire and the steel of the German army. We now have more tanks, more planes, more guns. Their merits as weapons greatly outweigh the power of German armament. This is a result of the great feats of the Soviet workers, a result of the inspired labour of collective intellect and collective will. The strength of this creative effort lies in the fact that it is shared by all the peoples of the Soviet Union, by people of all ages and all walks of life, from unskilled labourers to academicians. You see a young sapper at the front who has hit on the strikingly original idea of saving a bridge that the Germans have set on fire by dropping grenades into the river so that the water splashed high by the explosions will douse the flames, a month after our offensive began you see new super-tanks and self-propelled guns come crawling out of a wood, machines that have been created by human intellect to support the great offensive and give strength to the mighty victory effort, you begin to comprehend the general plan and realize that the difficult task of achieving victory embraces everybody from the infantry private and the sapper lad to the generals who are past masters of the art of leading troops.

This creative effort, seeking ever higher and more perfect forms, never resting satisfied with what has been achieved but looking ahead keenly and demandingly into the future—this creative effort, inspired by the Stalin type of strategy and welded by the Stalin unity of will, is the pledge of our victory.

1945

THE ROAD TO BERLIN

Letters En Route

MOSCOW—WARSAW

I

THE ROAD from Moscow to Warsaw stretches for a distance of twelve hundred kilometres. The broad ribbon of asphalt, now powdered with snow, now covered with a glassy layer of ice, now a stony-grey, ran between snowbound fields, marshes and forests. The chill wind whirled the snow over earth and waters turned frigid by the January frost. The wind blew along the highway and across it, raising a grey blurry mist in our path. Sometimes the forests receded generously on both sides of the road, but sometimes they closed in so thickly that it seemed our tiny covered jeep would never be able to elbow its way through the narrow slit that cut straight as a die through the solemn pines with white jerkins of snow over their broad green shoulders. Oaks, ashes and limes looked like dark unsightly skeletons, but the birches and the willows were so lovely that even the driver who had his eye glued to the treacherous wintry road most of the time, stole a glance of admiration at the exquisite tracery of their slender branches.

In quest of gasolene we turned off the highway to Kaluga and thence through Tikhonov Pustyn and Polotnyany Zavod we emerged on the main road again at Medyn. We drove through the ruins of Medyn, Yukhnov and Roslavl. Who will dare to call these ruins ugly? They are a reminder of the grim courage of our fighting men of 1941. The old watchman at Kaluga, philosophically-inclined like all watchmen, said as he closed the gates of the filling station behind our car:

"So you're going to Warsaw. The war is there now. But there was a winter here when I emptied drums of gasolene into the ditch just before the Germans entered Kaluga. Ten years from now the boys will come home from school and ask me: 'Grandpa, is it true the Germans were in Kaluga?'"

But the traces of the great battle of 1941, the peaceful cottages burned by the Germans and the German tanks destroyed by the Red Army men, are visible not only in Kaluga. They are in evidence at Polotnyany Zavod, and in Maloyaroslavets, and even in the vicinity of Podolsk. The war has left its mark everywhere, in the fire-gutted villages,

in the shell-torn trunks of ancient trees, in the abandoned snow-filled trenches, dugouts and the firing slits of semi-demolished forts that look like narrowed eyelids. The steel muzzles of machine guns and the eyes of fighting men looked through these slits during the grim winter of 1941. The great Battle of Moscow has left an ineradicable mark on the heart of the nation. All these names—Maloyaroslavets, Kaluga, Polotnyany Zavod, Yukhnov and Medyn—associated with fierce, bloody battles for the freedom and the life of Russia and Moscow will be preserved for ever in the history of the country and the memory of the people.

Who will dare to call these ruins ugly? They are the noble foundation of the edifice of tomorrow's victory. It was here that Stalin said: "Not a step back." Here glory's favourites Zhukov and Rokossovsky, now leading their armies beyond the borders of Germany, defended Moscow. The twelve hundred kilometre road to the Vistula is not only a long road, it is a road of anguish and toil, of infinite patience and courage, a road crimsoned with blood and sweat, a road laid by the millions of working folk, who built the tanks and the guns, the mortars and the shells for the army in the terrible winter of 1941. Every step of this road has been won in bitter fighting, every metre is measured in labour and deeds of valour. One million two hundred thousand metres, one and a half million steps—that is the highway from Moscow to Warsaw!

The car sped onward. The mileposts flashed by, the wind beat against us trying its best to tear off the plywood walls and canvas top that protected us from the cold. The light powdery snow blown through the cracks filled the car and the icy motes melted on our cheeks and foreheads. Twilight was approaching; a handsome fox in winter garb slipped across the road into the woods with a swirl of its luxurious tail. Before our driver, Sergeant-Major Ivan Penin—who had driven me to Stalingrad in September 1942—had jammed on the brakes the fox was a good hundred metres away. We jumped out and fired several pistol shots at it. The animal did not even turn to look at us or quicken its shrewd uneven pace. But although the whole incident had taken no more than a minute we got back into our jeep glowing with satisfaction at the thought that we had hunted fox!

The dusk thickened; in the yellow glare of the headlights the icy road turned to copper and a hare that leapt out onto the highway,

stunned and blinded by the shining monster racing toward him whirled about and froze into a white fluffy ball on the roadside.

In the morning we were in Byelorussia. We drove through Krichev, Propoisk and Dovsk and came to the thickly wooded section of the highway leading to Rogachev. Here half a year ago, through the broad valley of the Dnieper, our troops began the offensive that was to liberate Byelorussia. Here at 4 a.m. on June 19, 1944, the early morning sky was suddenly lit up by the flashes of fire from a thousand guns, the earth trembled from the volleys of artillery regiments and divisions and groaned under the weight of the advancing tanks.

Our car sped on toward Bobruisk. On either side of the road stood the rusty mutilated remains of thousands of German trucks and tanks, the spotted muzzles of German heavy guns. Anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns stared helplessly in all four directions. Here had seethed the "kessel" in which was trapped the Ninth German Army under Field Marshal von Bock. That army which bore the ill-fated number of the Ninth Army had been decimated by Rokossovsky's forces during their drive from the Kursk salient to the frontiers of Byelorussia. And now, after being formed for the third time, it was being smashed and routed on the Vistula by the forces of Marshal Zhukov in their swift movement toward the eastern frontiers of Germany.

We sped through Slutsk and semi-demolished Kartuz-Bereza, through areas which had seen the swift advance of our forces last autumn. The green corpses of our whippet tanks still stand by the wayside, mute witnesses of the treacherous blow struck by the Germans from Brest on the night of June 21, 1941. Dearly will the German have to pay for his perfidy! They will live to curse the day and the hour they crossed the Soviet frontier without declaring war. The grandchildren of contemporary Germans will remember that day as a day of disgrace and misfortune. He who first unsheathed the sword of an unjust war of plunder and conquest shall perish by the sword of retribution.

Just before dusk the western sky suddenly cleared up and the earth was bathed in a ruddy gold radiance of wondrous beauty. As we drove through the forest the shafts of light from the setting sun shining through the branches looked like the great wings of powerful aeroplanes speeding westward.

And our hearts leapt at the sight, for this shining radiance amid the black winter clouds seemed a promise of victory.

That night in Korbin we learned that Warsaw had been taken. Before dawn we were on our way again. The news of the capture of Warsaw had already spread to the Polish towns of Biala-Podlaska and Międzyrzecze. In Siedlec crowds were streaming to a meeting, the brasses of military bands gleamed in the sunlight as soldiers of the Polish army marched by. We had reached the last lap of the road to Warsaw. It was the usual frontline road, busy and congested, but at the same time there was an air of joyous excitement about it; in the honking of the automobiles, in the roaring of the engines and the clatter of caterpillar treads, in the eyes of those who were riding and walking toward Warsaw one felt jubilation and uplift.

Slowing down we drove through the crowded streets of the little town of Minsk-Masowiecki.

Then came Praga, the Warsaw equivalent of our Zamoskvorechye.

Here we saw real popular rejoicing—white-and-red flags waved colourfully in the breeze, balconies were hung with rugs, and banners decorated not only the tenanted houses but also the ruins as though proclaiming that the people who once lived there were also participating in the general celebration. For the inhabitants of Praga the liberation of Warsaw was the occasion for a dual celebration—they shared the joy of all Poland, they rejoiced in the knowledge that death which had dogged their footsteps for many months when the German guns and mortars had been trained on them had been vanquished. Thousands thronged the river embankment gazing eagerly at the liberated city on the other side.

Our jeep drove up to a blown-up bridge, snorted and stood still. Ours was probably the first car in many years that had arrived in Warsaw from Moscow by the old highway. We descended to the icebound river and made our way along the torn and twisted framework of the bridge to the tall stone pier on the western bank of the Vistula, and climbed up a tall swaying fireman's ladder to the embankment. As we came up the sentry, a middle-aged Red Army man, standing beside a small bonfire built on the embankment, was saying good-naturedly to a tommy-gunner standing by: "See, lad, what a nice crust I found in my pocket, we'll soon try our teeth on it." Those were the first words I heard in Warsaw. And I reflected that this man in the grey crumpled army coat, with the kindly face weathered by frosts and winds must have been one of the many who, after holding the enemy back in that terrible winter at Moscow, had marched

twelve hundred kilometres through the flames of the great war of liberation to get here. And for a brief instant the whole of this tortuous road traversed through fire, death, blizzards, frosts and rain rose before my eyes.

II

MAJESTIC and sorrowful, one might even say tragic, was liberated Warsaw. The German demon of wanton destruction and malice had done its evil work in the more than five years it had dominated over Poland's capital. It was as if a huge monster had broken loose and stampeded through the city hammering with fists of iron at the tall buildings, knocking down walls, kicking down doors and smashing windows, upsetting monuments, tying steel beams and girders into knots, setting ablaze everything that would burn, clawing with steel nails at pavements and streets. Heaps of bricks filled the streets of this large city. A maze of paths like hunters' trails in the jungles wound across the broad squares and thoroughfares of downtown Warsaw. People returning to the city had to climb over heaps of rubble; only a few streets, Marszalkowska, Krakowskie Przedmieście and one or two others, were open to traffic. The southeastern section of the city which includes the Belweder palace and park were in a slightly better condition. Several buildings had survived there and could be repaired with comparative ease.

It is invariably the visible evidence of the evil handiwork of the Germans that strikes one on entering a demolished city. And in crippled Warsaw too it was the staggering spectacle of destruction that impressed us primarily: the thousands, tens of thousands of wrecked buildings, the smoke-blackened walls, the smashed columns, the ruined churches, theatres, factories, palaces, the yawning gaps in roofs, the demolished staircases, the empty window-frames, the desolate, deserted ruins where you could meet no living creature. Perhaps wolves and foxes prowled at night among the jungle of wrecked Warsaw streets in search of food, perhaps the hare laid his tortuous trail here. Yet it is not only Warsaw's outward beauty the German cutthroats disfigured. It is not only stone fashioned by man that they destroyed.

A tragedy a thousand times more terrible than that whose traces appal us today was enacted here in Warsaw. Something immeasurably more precious than the finest and most magnificent palaces and tem-

ples in the world was destroyed here: human life, the most precious thing on earth!

The living, sparkling eyes of children and of their mothers and grandparents once looked out of each of these now dead and sightless windows of these tens of thousands of murdered homes. Those eyes are now dead too. Tens and hundreds of thousands of people—professors, teachers, mechanics, artists, bookkeepers, watchmakers, architects, opticians, doctors, engineers, weavers, bakers and stone-masons—once walked these now deserted streets. Many of them will never see free Warsaw. Tens of thousands of talented, honest, brave, hardworking people, active builders of life and fighters for freedom, have been butchered by the Germans. Even now the bodies of the gallant men and women who took part in the tragic, doomed uprising lie frozen in the cellars of the ruined buildings. After the uprising the Germans drove the inhabitants out of the city, they tore ruthlessly to pieces the complex fabric of life woven by Warsaw's one and a half million inhabitants. People of hundreds and thousands of professions and occupations were scattered over the countryside, in the villages and woods. The heart of Poland ceased to beat. But the force of life is stronger than death, and slowly, timidly life is being infused into the stricken body of Warsaw.

Looking at the first people who had ventured back to the city in a gallant attempt to pick up the broken threads of their mutilated lives, wierd figures bundled in shawls and wraps, I tried to guess at their professions. That man with the trimmed reddish beard who wore an expensive fur coat and spectacles and sat on a heap of suitcases piled high on a peasant cart might have been a famous physician, or a university professor perhaps. The pedestrian carrying a huge bundle on his broad shoulders looked like a stone-mason. The hollow-eyed cyclist wearing a beret who pedalled his way over the narrow path through the ruins with a bundle tied to his parcel rack could have been a watchmaker. There was a group of people of various ages wearing hats and berets, fur coats, spring coats and mackintoshes, pushing thick-tired baby carriages loaded with bundles and bags. And there were young girls who breathed on their numbed fingers to thaw them out as they stared sadly at the ruins, their slim figures and slender legs disfigured by thick shawls and huge men's boots and heavy gaiters. There were already hundreds and thousands of these people who

gazed at their redeemed city with mingled expressions of pain and joy. sorrow and happiness.

We crossed over to the northwestern section of the city. This had been the Warsaw ghetto. A red brick wall about three and a half metres high encircled the streets and blocks within its limits. The wall, about 50 centimetres thick, had jagged fragments of glass jutting out from its sides and was enmeshed in rusty barbed wire. This wall, the gloomy Gmina—*Judenrat*—building, and two churches were all the Germans left standing in the ghetto. Not even the skeletons of buildings such as line the Warsaw streets outside, had survived.

An unbroken expanse of red rubble surrounded by the brick wall is all that remains of dozens of blocks of houses, streets and alleys; it was hard to find a single whole brick in this sea of debris. Only by the undulations of its surface could one judge of the height of the buildings that once stood here. In that rubble were buried many thousands of people blown to pieces by the Germans. Five hundred thousand Jews were driven into the Warsaw ghetto at the beginning of 1942, and all but a few of them perished either here or in the death factories at Treblinka and Majdanek. In April 1943, when only 50,000 Jews remained alive in the ghetto, a mutiny broke out among the doomed people. For forty days and forty nights a fearful battle raged between the poorly-armed insurgents and the SS regiments. The Germans sent a tank division and bomber aircraft against the rebels. Men, women and children inside the ghetto fought to their last breath. It is the soul-stirring tale of this epic struggle that is told today by the lifeless expanse of brick rubble that once was the ghetto. Nor is there anyone to come back to it; its inhabitants are dead and cremated, and their cold ashes have been scattered over fields and roads. We met only four people here. One of them, a man with a face of a living corpse, carried away in a child's basket a handful of ashes of the rebels who had been burned to death by the Gestapo in the yard of the Gmina.

We visited a crypt where six Poles and four Jews had hid for long months. The most fertile imagination could not describe this secret stone burrow that had been carved into the fourth floor of a ruined building. To reach it you had to climb up the sheer wall of a wrecked stair well, cross a narrow beam over an abyss of wreckage, and squeeze through a narrow dark hole cut into the wall of a pantry.

The young Polish girl—one of the residents of this hiding place—who acted as our guide stepped bravely and calmly over the abyss.

But I who had spent three and a half years on the war fronts made the journey to a secret refuge with a palpitating heart. Yet the inhabitants of the hideout had made the journey not by day but on dark moonless nights to escape the watchful eyes of the Germans.

Presently we were in the street again. Now tens of thousands of people were pouring into the city from east and west, north and south. Scientists and artisans, architects and doctors, working men and artists were returning from the snowy fields to the capital of Poland. These men and women were the flesh and blood of Warsaw. In arduous but joyous labour of free men they would rebuild their city, weave again the complex pattern of its life, raise Liberated Warsaw from the ashes.

The next morning our jeep with much initial snorting and spluttering swung us back on the highway and scuttled along toward Łódź and Kutno, farther and farther westward in the wake of the great army we had followed all the way from Moscow.

January 20, 1945
Byelorussian Front

BETWEEN THE VISTULA AND THE ODER

I

AS THESE LINES are being written, dozens of planes are roaring overhead on their way through a blinding snowstorm to Poznań Citadel, only a few kilometres away, and the air is shattered by the thunder of our guns and the ominous howl of the Katyushas mingling with the rattle of hundreds of machine guns. Before long Poznań will be added to the long list of towns that have fallen under the impact of our blows, and the German regiments, the Landwehr, Volkssturm and cadet detachments defending it will join the dozens of other prisoner of war detachments marching to the east.

But now the battle is at its height, now the Germans are being dislodged from their forts inch by inch (in one case the sappers poured two drums of kerosene through a pipe into one of the forts and set fire to it, smoking the Germans out). General Chuikov, bending over the plan of the city with the telephone receiver to his ear, has just yelled into the mouthpiece: "Don't fire at the centre, Glebov's there!" Then, with a gay laugh, he tapped his adjutant on the nose with his

pencil and said: "Well, we've got the whole terrain under fire now. Next thing you'll know our troops will have sliced right through."

In the meantime the troops outflanking blockaded Poznań are pushing forward into Pomerania, shortening the distance remaining to Berlin daily and hourly. Tens of thousands of people—Red Army men, officers, generals, tankmen, flyers, truck drivers, traffic regulators, bakers, waitresses in officers' messes and supply train personnel—are counting the miles to the German capital. This is no sporting score. It is a score of life and death, honour and pride, a score of a nation's vengeance. Millions of heavy soldiers' boots are chalking up this score as the troops blaze a path with fire and steel to Berlin.

Driving from Warsaw to Poznań one is struck by the sharp changes in landscape en route. But it is not only the geographical landscape that is changing; the economic, social and political landscape, the entire mode of life on this territory differs from that which we have seen before. According to the Germans this is no longer a protectorate, no longer a governor-generalship, but the Reich, the German state proper, the "third adjunct," the "Vaterland."

Villages alternate with farmsteads. Houses with gabled roofs and little gardens fronted by monotonous clipped hedges reminding one of brooms occur more and more frequently as do great manorial estates. Here is one of the latter. Before the outbreak of war in 1939 it belonged to a Pole. Later Hitler presented it to a German officer upon the latter's retirement from the army. The new owner fled a few days ago, abandoning his servants, horses, cattle, fowl and wine cellars. Although he travelled light he did not get very far before our tanks caught up with him.

The roads are full of Germans carrying bundles and bags. These are people who attempted to flee but were overtaken by our troops. Now they are returning from west to east, shuffling along with lowered heads, glowering at the steel flood streaming along the highway. Their journey is not an easy one, for the local Poles—old men, women and children—curse them as they pass, shake their fists at them and cover them with abuse. Unenviable as was the life of the Poles in the governor-generalship, it was far less terrible than the lot of the Poles who lived in the German Reich. When they annexed the Łódź and Poznań areas, separating them from the Polish governor-generalship by a barbed-wire fence, the Germans fettered the Poles with fearful chains of slavery and poverty. Nearly all the rural Polish intelligentsia—

teachers, lawyers, doctors and priests—were shipped to Dachau or Oświęcim. For five and a half years Polish children were forbidden to attend schools. The youngsters were not even allowed to learn the alphabet. From the age of twelve the village children had to work as agricultural labourers, while those who dwelt in the cities were obliged to work in factories. Polish peasants were denied even the right to pray. Nearly all the churches were closed and used as German warehouses. The Poles were driven from the land, which was handed over to Germans. Poles were driven from their homes to make room for German settlers. Personal belongings, cows and horses were taken from the Poles and given to the Germans. Fathers were separated from children, husbands from wives, and all were forced to slave on the land. Every German had four to six Polish farm labourers working for him for next to nothing. An adult labourer received 20 marks, minors 6 marks a month. The daughter of the owner of the house at which we stayed—a girl of fifteen—had received 60 marks for 11 months' work. The Germans sold food to the Poles illegally and at prices so high that the girl I spoke of would have had to work three years to buy a kilo of fat back. The highest authority in the village was the Ostbauernführer. The lives and liberty of the people were completely at his mercy. He sent our host's neighbour to Oświęcim merely because a year before the Germans had arrived he had said to a peasant who spoke German: "This is not Berlin, so why speak German?"

Questions pertaining to the distribution of land to the Germans were settled with the participation of the local branch of the fascist party. Bauernführer Schwandt, a man of massive proportions who owned a saloon and a grocery, did not consider it necessary to pay his farm labourers. He had six of them, three men and three women, and at the end of the season he dismissed them without a pfennig. Before the war this Schwandt owned four morgs (a morg is 1.38 acres) of land; now by the simple expedient of robbing his Polish neighbours he had taken possession of 50 morgs.

The Poles who did own some land and implements on the territory of the Reich were in a worse plight than ordinary farm labourers. This was essentially not farm labour but downright enslavement of the Poles by the Germans who had taken possession of Polish territory. A Pole had no right to leave the village or to change masters. Attempts to cross from the territory of the Reich to the governor-generalship were punished by death. Polish peasants were strictly

forbidden to use the railways or to appear in public gardens or parks. Nor could the Polish peasant drown his sorrows in a glass of wine on a Sunday for the law permitted the sale of strong drink only to Germans.

There were five varieties of Germans here: Black Sea, Balkan, Baltic, Reichsdeutsche and Volksdeutsche. The first three categories had been shipped in mainly in 1941 to settle Polish lands the Germans had seized. The year 1944 saw the influx of a new wave of Germans who came from the countries and areas the fascists had to give up.

There is a law in Germany which makes it obligatory for the peasants to deliver all their agricultural produce to special purchasing depots where they are paid 9 marks for 100 kg. of potatoes and 20 marks for 100 kg. of rye. Notwithstanding the careful check up kept by commissions with the participation of fascist party officials. the new farmer settlers sold grain and potatoes on the side at speculative prices. The Poles were thus forced to pay exorbitant prices for their own rye and wheat, to pay with their miserly earnings for the fruit of their backbreaking toil.

This is how the Polish peasants lived. Is it surprising then that they vent their hatred on the Germans who are slinking back after their unsuccessful attempt to cross the Oder?

Is it really necessary, now that this cruel war is nearing its end, to prove to anyone that German fascism is the slaughterhouse of nations? Yet how manyfold are the forms fascist evil takes! At every step some new hideous aspect of fascism is encountered. The essence of fascism showed itself to be equally revolting at a distance of two thousand kilometres from the frontiers of Germany where by the lurid glare of fires the invaders plundered and murdered Russian peasants on the bank of the Volga, in Baby Yar on the Dnieper cliffs where the Germans buried alive Jewish children, and at Majdanek beyond the Vistula where people of twenty European nations were done to death. And here, within 150-200 kilometres from Berlin, the bestial aspect of German fascism, the poison of race hatred, is just as repellent although its forms are slightly different.

II

THREE DAYS ago we left Łódź. Łódź is a large industrial city, with more than a thousand enterprises, including no less than five hundred large plants and factories. Łódź was wrested from the Germans so

swiftly that the fascists did not have time to destroy life in this Polish Manchester.

For five years the city was part of the Reich. It was renamed Litzmanstadt, after a German general who had some mysterious "services" to his credit in fighting the Russian armies in 1914.

There is not a single Polish sign in the entire city. Everything is totally Germanized, everything bristles with the names of Hitler, Goering, Ludendorf, etc. While in the countryside the Polish peasant was degraded to the status of a feudal labourer, the Pole in Łódź became a feudal worker. The Poles in the Reich were called "*Untermenschen*," and there existed a host of humiliating restrictions, taboos and discriminations against the Łódź Poles too. They were deprived of enterprises and shops, they were driven out of all engineering, bookkeeping and legal posts; and the higher schools and universities were open to Germans only. Dragnets to hunt down Poles were a common occurrence in restaurants, cinemas and theatres. Many shops were closed to Poles. For some reason Poles were permitted to ride only in the trailer trams: "The Germans are giving us a ride," they used to jest grimly. There were cloakrooms, dining rooms, baths and lavatories at factories marked: "*Nur für Deutsche.*" There existed special labour laws, special wage rates, diets and food rations for the German workers. All this was aimed not so much at improving the conditions of the German workers as at attacking the morale and physical conditions of existence of the Polish worker, it served the base ends of the same senseless idea of the racial superiority of the Germans over the other nations on earth.

This inhuman race policy laid its stamp on the entire life of Łódź. And, of course, it applied to the Łódź Jews even in greater measure than to the Poles. Part of the city was fenced off with barbed wire and turned into a ghetto. If an "Aryan" street happened to run between two districts of the ghetto the Germans built tall bridges for the Jews to pass over so that they might not defile "Aryan" soil. Two hundred and fifty thousand Jews were slaughtered in the Łódź ghetto during the four and a half years of its existence. One September day in 1942 the Germans took 17,000 Jewish children under twelve to be massacred. What imagination is capable of picturing such a scene? Of the 250,000 inhabitants of the ghetto only 850 persons survived; Soviet tanks entered Łódź the day they were to be executed.

For five long years this city with a population of half a million endured suffering and torment under the iron heel of German fascism.

With the Deputy Minister of Industry of the Polish Government and a representative of our command I visited the biggest German war plants in Łódź. That the laws of fascism had been vigorously enforced here was evident from the racial division of the workers, the dungeons and cells that smacked of the Middle Ages set up in the cellars for latecomers, and the concrete forts with the guns pointed both at the factory gates and at the windows of the main shops. It was evident from the stories the workers told of the beatings, floggings and abuse they had been subjected to by the German managers. Nearly all these factories had belonged to Poles prior to 1939. The Germans seized them and turned them into war plants. In most cases they were owned by stock companies and supervised by directors who came from the interior of the Reich. A brief survey of these German plants revealed that their output and geographical distribution had been dictated not by the will of the "owners" but by the Red Army and the bomber aircraft of our Allies. There are "refugee" plants, invalid plants, patchwork plants made up of departments from several different enterprises, even factory departments made up of machines moved here to escape bombings in various parts of Germany.

Take the Ion machine tool and metal working plant, for example. What a queer conglomeration of equipment! A huge machine for the manufacture of torpedoes—the Germans began assembling it in the summer of 1944 and were about to start it when the Red Army arrived; an automatic multiple lathe for machining heavy tank parts; a machine intended to turn out main propeller shaft bearings for submarines; machines for manufacturing bands for shells. One such plant was destroyed by British aircraft in the interior of Germany, another was smashed up in Poznań. This is the third. The Germans scattered both their industries and industrial processes. Parts produced in different plants all over Germany and the occupied countries, were assembled else where. Workshops were constantly on the move, constantly changing their address, constantly being wrecked and constantly trying to revive.

Now the Red Army is putting an end to these troubles: hundreds and perhaps thousands of major and minor enterprises, factories and workshops which produced for the fascists have already been caught in a vast net of steel. German industry has been broken up, the foundation of the odious edifice has cracked, and the hour is near

when the walls of the fascist dungeon will crumble, burying the hangmen of the European nations beneath their ruins.

We visited another large enterprise of the same firm.

This plant employing more than 2,500 workers produced Junkers and Messerschmitt engines. Fifty-eight brand new engines, tested and crated, lie in the warehouse. Once this had been a spinning mill owned by the French firm of Alar Rousseau. The German aircraft engine works that had taken over the premises was driven by Allied bombers from Munich to Eisenach, in Thuringia, where it was split up into sections. From Thuringia the plant was chased to Łódź. But here the approach of the Red Army forced the fascists to move the main departments to another Polish city. The feverish gyrations of this fascist war plant between the western and eastern borders indeed reminded one of a mad wolf at bay.

Here too, near Poznań, where our shells are playing havoc with the German forts, where our Ilyushin assault planes are roaring overhead and machine-gun fire rents the air, there are quite a few German plants.

Amid the din of the cannonade burly Colonel Yelizarov jots down the names of the Poznań enterprises reported to him by an officer. There is the Focke-Wulf plant, a plant producing armoured trains, factories turning out grenades, tommy guns, rifles, small-aim ammunition, automobiles and automobile tires. Deeper and wider grows the fatal crack in the very foundations of the fascist social system. The walls of the prison of the European nations are already tottering.

January 30, 1945

GERMANY

I

IT WAS a sunny morning when we reached the Oder at the point where it flows nearest to Berlin. It seemed strange that the muddy lane, the low bushes, the rare trees, the low hills descending to the river, and the small houses scattered among the fields emerald with winter grain—all this familiar landscape to which the eye had grown so accustomed—were located in the heart of Germany, less than eighty kilometres from Berlin.

This was the day our troops pushed up to the middle reaches of the Oder in Brandenburg Province. The sun was warm, the air was light and pure, but the enemy sky was not kind to us on this warm, calm morning. Dozens of aircraft circled above us, and the air was filled with the barking of cannon, the rattle of machine-gun bursts, the droning of motors and the thunder of bomb explosions. Hundreds of Focke-Wulfs, Messerschmitts and dive bombers from the Berlin and adjacent aerodromes formed a black, ugly, restless cloud over the Oder, like an agitated swarm of hornets and wasps seeking in fury and terror to protect their disturbed hive.

But our troops pushed on through the lethal hell. I saw our infantry advancing slowly and deliberately in a long chain to the river.... The men moved with heavy tread, their bodies bent slightly forward, rifles and tommy guns at the ready, and neither the weight of the rain-sodden squelchy earth nor the fire and steel that rained down on them from the spring sky could check this movement, magnificent in its triumphant relentlessness. In the meantime heavy self-propelled guns, artillery and mortars were moving along the roads to the Oder. The Red Army had that day reached the last water barrier between us and the German capital; there were no more natural obstacles between the First Byelorussian Front and Berlin. How many hundreds of these great and small barriers had been crossed by the army that had advanced from the Volga to the Oder. With the same triumphant and deliberate tread the fighting men of the Red Army had marched to the Don, the Donetz and the Dnieper, the Drut and the Berezina, the Western Bug and the Niemen, the Vistula and the Warta in their advance from the Volga to the evil heart of Germany.

Suddenly on this spring morning at the Oder I remembered how in the bitter winter of 1942, in the face of a cruel January blizzard, through a night lit up by the crimson flames of a burning village, a despatch rider wrapped in a sheepskin greatcoat had cried out:

"Hey there, fellows, which is the road to Berlin?"

And I remembered the loud guffaws that had greeted his sally.

Is he alive, I wonder, that joker who asked the way to Berlin when we were still at Balaklei? Are they still among the living, those who laughed so heartily at his question that night three years ago? Yet in that jest uttered on a bitterly cold night of a grim winter there was a small but precious grain of an indomitable faith in the triumph of good over evil. And I recalled too an excerpt from Hitler's

order issued in the winter of 1941 to turn the Russian countryside into wasteland.

"Let the flames of burning Russian villages light up the roads by which my reserves shall advance to the front lines. . . ." These brutal and arrogant words bore the seed of fascism's downfall, the seed of the collapse of the ideology of race hatred, malice, slavery and bloodshed.

Yes, one recalled many things in the days and hours when our troops were penetrating into the interior of fascist Germany. And on that memorable evening when we crossed the German frontier and stepped from the car onto the soft carpet of pine needles in the forest, inhaling the fragrant breath of the earth and looking out over the fields, groves and valleys to the houses with their gabled roofs covered with red tiles we longed to call out to the fighting men who lay in eternal slumber on the battlefields of Russia, the Ukraine, Byelorussia and Poland: "Can you hear us, comrades, we are there!"

And, who knows, perhaps the lifeless hearts of millions of slain children and women, the hearts of innocent victims strangled in the noose or drowned in wells, throbbed for a brief instant; perhaps the ashes of those burned to death stirred in that hour when our tanks and infantry crossed the frontier into Brandenburg.

"Mothers, sisters, infants and aged, all ye who are no more, hear us, we are there!"

But all is still. Only the sound of the trucks rolling over the highway hauling long-barrelled guns, Katyushas, radio stations, ammunition, all the complex paraphernalia of war, breaks the silence. Before us lie the fields, the forests, the manors, villages, groves and townships of Germany. The Oder. This is Germany, these are German towns, German villages, German lands, forests and waters, German air and sky. . . . And the setting sun with divine, careless magnanimity shines forth, smiling in thousands of puddles, in the windows of houses, in the heavy crystals of the melting snow that lies in the ditches and in the shadow of the pines.

II

I HAVE visited many cities and towns, villages, estates and farmsteads in Brandenburg Province. How can I unravel the great tangle of impressions gained during these past few days and weeks?

On the walls of many German houses, under green-shuttered windows, you find a large inscription printed in neat lettering: "*Licht ist dein Tod*" (Light is your death!).

This is an air raid precaution slogan that was intended to remind the population of the black-out regulations. Yet it struck me as the perfect slogan for Adolf Hitler and the inhuman principles he and his henchmen followed in every sphere of public and private life. Light is your death! This was the underlying principle of fascist theory and practice throughout the years of their domination. It governed the lives of the German people for twelve years.

Yes, times change!

There was a time in this land of darkness when Goethe, the great poet and thinker, said on his deathbed: "*Licht, mehr Licht!*"

The labour of millions of foreign workers driven to Germany from the east, west, north and south, came to be the most important factor in the "economic propaganda" of Hitlerism. This labour was paid for at rates three, five and ten times below that of the German workers. The German worker in Germany received between 100 and 200 marks a month, depending upon his skill. The foreign worker received from 15 to 30 marks for the same work. Moreover, the food ration of the foreign worker was much below that of the German. The former received 300 grams of bread and a bowl of slops at the factory. Sometimes a portion of sausage weighing about five grams would be issued. The German worker was given a normal dinner at the factory in addition to his ration card which provided himself and his family with bread, fats or their substitutes, sugar, meat and other food.

Moreover, the leaders of the German state tried to apply the fascist principle of racial differentiation even among the foreign workers, giving the western workers certain privileges as compared to the workers from the east. In order to disunite the workers still further the "Ost" group was also subdivided into Western Ukrainians, Eastern Ukrainians, Russians and Byelorussians.

It is natural that this economic inequality between the Germans and the various groups of foreign workers was accompanied by an even more outrageous legal inequality. Camps for foreign workers were to all intents and purposes concentration camps encircled by barbed wire. The "führers" and "führerins" of these camps were nothing more or less than jailers. The system of monstrous fines

which sometimes ate up wages for several months in advance, the humiliating searches, the rules preventing "Ost" workers from leaving camp grounds throughout the six work days, the laws forbidding them to walk on pavements, to visit cinemas, concerts and theatres, making it obligatory for them to jump to their feet and stand at attention when a German entered the room, and, last but not least, the extensive employment of corporal punishment were all bitter insults to the dignity and self-respect of people who so recently had been free. Moreover, all foreign workers were in constant danger of being transferred from the labour camps to prison or death camps. Foreign workers who fell ill were given practically no medical treatment and doctors were forbidden to prescribe medicines for them of which there was a shortage.

This racial division of the proletariat, this artificial fanning of racial antagonism, this system of racial discrimination imposed upon a huge mass of proletarians consisting of some ten to fifteen nationalities was essentially the basic principle of the fascist industrialists. What was the result of this policy? The German workers were deceived into believing that they were the members of a race of masters destined to rule the world. In the dark miasmic fog that engulfed Germany they ceased to discern their real enemies. It should be remembered that this moral and political corruption of the German working class had been preceded already before the war by a reign of terror, by the physical annihilation of hundreds of thousands of the finest and most honest German workers. I do not undertake to judge which produced the more disastrous result, the physical or the moral destruction of the German worker. True, up to the last there were cases—I repeat what was told me by my own countrymen and by the French—of German workers establishing contact with the foreign workers, giving them material assistance, sympathizing with them, expressing their hatred for Hitler and giving them encouraging tidbits of news heard over the radio. But this was the exception. On the whole, the German working class had no desire to oppose fascism in its criminal attempt to enslave the world.

It is interesting to note that the fascists did not succeed in splitting up the multi-national army of foreign workers. The odious system of privileges made no difference; the united front of hatred for the fascists was unbroken. And indeed it is impossible to listen unmoved to the stories of the noble and courageous friendship, of the

great comradeship, the glorious brotherhood of oppressed proletarians driven to Germany from all the countries of Europe. Frenchmen, Poles, Belgians, Czechs, Dutch, Serbs, Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, as well as British and American prisoners of war were all members of the great brotherhood of workmen and soldiers, the International of Freedom and Honour. They remained uncontaminated by the ulcer of racism. The efforts of the Nazis were in vain. I talked to Frenchmen who lived for five years in the poisonous atmosphere of the Hitler empire. They were all full of loathing for the race theory, all were loyal to the great ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity.

The roads are thronged with liberated workers and prisoners of war going home. I have never seen a more moving spectacle. Some of them have coloured patches on the front and back of their tunics: identification marks sewn on in the camp. The French wear violet triangles, the Americans white and blue squares. Some have such patches sewn on their trouser legs. Some travel on foot, others ride in carts taken from the Germans, still others on bicycles, in cabriolets and cabs. Several American soldiers are riding on a tractor; they found it abandoned on the roadside, repaired it and hitched a large covered waggon on as a trailer. Some of the released captives travel in large groups numbering 200 to 300 persons, others in small groups. Many march carrying banners, many wear their national colours on their arms. The Red Soviet banner, the French tricolor, the Belgian, American and Polish flags, and the flags of Yugoslavia and Holland wave gaily in the breeze. There are lanky, broad-shouldered American paratroopers dressed in khaki jackets, Frenchmen in berets and trench caps, Russian girls wearing white kerchiefs, Ukrainian boys in short jackets, a Dutchman wearing a top hat and side-breezers, olive-skinned, haggard Italians with scarves at their throats, Czechs in windbreakers, Poles of both sexes. They all talk and gesture animatedly as they go. Among the crowd are some Russian children aged about twelve or thirteen dressed in rags. We stop two dark-skinned, thick-lipped soldiers. They smile with joy and confusion. Only two words do we distinguish in their guttural speech: India, Bombay.... But strangely enough, in spite of the great chaos of nationalities and languages everyone seems to understand one another. I have seen Red Army sergeants or corporals who, as they say here, speak all languages

except foreign languages, chatting with French non-commissioned officers and soldiers and getting along splendidly.

That Hitler Germany was a prison for the nations of the world is brought home forcibly as one watches tens of thousands of released captives emerging from the world's Bastille to take up the sacred rights of man once more. And again and again one reflects on the significance of the great exploit our people and our army have accomplished.

III

THE PROPORTION of foreign slave labour in fascist Germany was very great. Many enterprises were manned exclusively by foreigners. Tens of thousands of agricultural labourers, both men and women, brought from Poland, Russia, the Ukraine, Byelorussia and Czechoslovakia worked on the large landed estates. There was literally not a single farmstead that did not employ from two to four farmhands brought from the East. I have met hundreds of girls from Odessa, Kherson, Dniepropetrovsk, Kiev, Vinnitsa, Kamenets-Podolsk and Chernigov areas in the German villages. A large number of young boys and girls shipped from the Ukraine and Byelorussia worked for the German farmers. The day after our invasion of Germany we met a crowd of some eight hundred Soviet children bound for the East; the column stretched for many kilometres along the road which was lined with Red Army men and officers silently and tensely scanning the children's faces—those were fathers searching for children who had been carried off to Germany. One Colonel stood thus for several hours, his shoulders erect, his face grim and dark, and when evening came he gave up his fruitless vigil and returned to his car.

Labour in agriculture was incomparably harder than labour in industry. Here the lives and the honour of the workers were wholly at the mercy of the master or mistress. The workday began in darkness and ended in darkness. And although it was generally agreed that the agricultural workers were considerably better fed than in the towns, the people preferred to live in factory camps rather than work on farms.

No doubt the slave labour of millions of foreign workers was the economic foundation on which Hitler built the race ideology in Germany. Both the working class and the peasantry of Germany were

terrorized and browbeaten, bribed, duped and corrupted by fascism. But now and again in the villages too I heard about peasants who treated the foreign workers with sympathy and who hated fascism. These individual cases, however, did not influence the terrorist laws that governed the life of the fascist empire.

Although relatively speaking the conditions of the working strata of the German population as compared to the dreadful, hopeless slavery to which foreign workers in Germany were doomed represented the height of prosperity, the life of the German people was actually anything but enviable.

Terror, deceit, denunciation, imprisonment in camps and jails, execution of those who were discontented with the existing regime, a host of orphans, widows, aged men and women, parents, sons and husbands whose sons had been killed at the front—these were the universal salient features of the fascist "paradise."

In the small town of Schwerin I saw eight old men between seventy and eighty living in one tiny dark room. Their sons had been killed at the front. They had all been workers in the past. Their pension was miserly. The poverty and squalor in which they lived (one of the old men was blind, two paralysed) defies description. Hitler did not bother to waste his demagogic "solicitude" on such human derelicts.

It was only in Germany proper that we could properly appreciate the tremendous scope and intensity of the work carried on by Goebbels' gigantic factory of demagogy and lies known as the Ministry of Propaganda. There are fascist posters everywhere and private homes are literally stacked with printed matter crammed full of shameless falsehoods. The theatre, cinema, gramophone records were all used to spread the Nazi ideology. I looked through some of the copybooks in the schools and found that beginning with the first grades nearly all the exercises and compositions, written in uncertain childish hand, were devoted to war themes and Nazi deeds. Portraits, posters, texts on the walls of classrooms were all directed to one end—the glorification of Hitler and the precepts of Nazism.

For twelve years the Hitlerites dinned their criminal propaganda into the ears of millions of Germans. There are many young men and women in Germany today between the ages of seventeen and twenty who have read nothing but fascist books, newspapers and pamphlets, who have heard none but Nazi speeches at meetings and over the air,

who have attended fascist schools and universities, seen none but Nazi films and plays.

This young generation, brought up exclusively on the ideas of Hitlerism, constitutes the main and most fanatical support of the fascist regime. The young generation was subjected to the most corrupting influence during the initial period of Germany's military successes, it embraced the race "theory" without question. And even today at this crucial moment it is to the German youth that Hitler and his gang appeal. I have heard stories told by our young men and women about German schoolchildren who detained them when they attempted to escape from Nazi camps, and who displayed great zeal in this kind of sleuthing. I think that the job of restoring the Soviet cities wrecked by the German army would help bring these fanatical champions of Nazism to their senses.

IV

WHAT ABOUT the Germans we see today on the territory of Germany? When you enter a German town the first thing that strikes the eye are hundreds and thousands of white flags hoisted over doors and gateways, hanging from every window, fastened to windowsills and shutters. Germans, men and women, young and old, wear white arm bands. This is a declaration of surrender. Why have they remained here, why did they not leave with the German troops?

Some answer this question quite frankly: "We wanted to leave, we tried to leave, but we could not because the Soviet tanks overtook us on the way and we were obliged to return."

Others claim that they had no intentions of leaving, knowing that sooner or later the Red Army would catch up with them. Still others say that they were daunted by the difficulties of evacuation, they had heard that refugees who had moved to Western Germany were suffering appalling privations, sleeping under the open sky, starving, roaming for weeks on end over fields and roads without shelter or assistance. And there are others—old men and women and invalids—who have remained because they were abandoned by both their relatives and the authorities.

I have spoken to Germans who were in Berlin only a few days ago. And indeed, their stories about the situation in the German capital are enough to deter anyone from making the journey. Hunger,

cold, fires, air raids, Gestapo terror, nights spent among the ruins of Berlin buildings—such is the fate of tens of thousands of refugees from the eastern provinces of Germany passing through Berlin.

Here in the towns of Brandenburg Province we have seen quite a few Germans evacuated from the western districts of Germany, particularly from the Ruhr which has been so heavily pounded by Allied aircraft. I have already mentioned the plants and equipment the Germans shifted from west to east. Now we saw those who had worked in these industries and those who owned them.

When you tell German civilians about the tremendous suffering and devastation wrought by fascist Germany and her brigand armies in the Soviet Union, they will tell you that they know all about it and hasten to add that they personally have nothing to do with the crimes and atrocities perpetrated by the German forces.

"That was done by the Nazis, the Gestapo, the SS, SD, and SA," claim the German civilians. "We didn't do it. . . ."

That may be so, but I was present during the registration in a fair-sized German town of members of the National Socialist Party whose flight had been cut short by our tanks. There were about eighty of them, including men who had been party members for ten to thirteen years, and who had served the fascist government of Germany well. There were some with whose names Hitler and Himmler were no doubt familiar. But curiously enough they too disclaimed their guilt on the grounds that they had been forced into the National Socialist Party; that they loathed the Hitler regime and would be glad to renounce it. Not one of them would assume even an infinitesimal fraction of the blame for what the Nazi party had done during the war years. There was actually one German who had served in SS detachments operating against Soviet partisans and to suppress Soviet peasants who had rebelled against the Hitler invaders. He too declared himself a victim of the Hitlerite regime, maintaining that his will had been paralysed by the fascist terror and hence he was not responsible for his actions.

I believe and hope that when establishing the guilt of the participants in the fascist crimes the court of the United Nations will manage without philosophical disputes as to whether their actions were voluntary or not. The trial will be a just one, and the sentence will be passed in the name of the millions of children, women, old

men and unarmed war prisoners whose ashes are beating today upon the hearts of Red Army men.

Every fighting man, officer and general of the great Red Army which is fighting its way victoriously to Berlin, all of us who are on German territory today, regard the responsibility of the German people somewhat differently than half a year ago. This is because half a year ago the question was still in a sense hypothetical. Today it is a practical question. For today we are in Germany!

The way to approach this question today and tomorrow is, I believe, for each of us to summon his spiritual strength to the maximum to fight the German army, which has shielded itself with the false slogan of defence of its territories and which is endeavouring with increasing ferocity and cunning to check our victorious advance. The sense of responsibility to our country at this final stage of the war must be elevated to unprecedented heights. Discipline must be perfect. This is an essential prerequisite of victory, our great people demand it of their army.

The judgment of our people over the war criminals will be stern and merciless. Crocodile tears will not help the fascists, the Gestapo and its henchmen, to evade punishment. The court of the nations will find them out and give them their just deserts. Let the guilty quake!

But the Red Army, marching forward under its great banners of glory, honour and freedom, is not fighting children, women and old people. We shall determine the degree of responsibility to be borne by Germany's menfolk. It will not be the same for those who came to the Soviet land for plunder, murder and rape, and for those who, stunned with terror, meekly worked at Hitler's plants and factories without taking part in the fascist orgy. The Red Army knows that there were people in Germany who suffered in prisons and concentration camps for fighting the Hitlerite regime. By its victorious advance through Germany the Red Army is hastening the day when the brigands, cutthroats and murderers will be brought to judgment. It will be a trial sterner than any the world has ever seen, but it will be no hasty wreaking of vengeance in which the innocent may perish and the guilty escape. Those Germans whose hands are stained with blood, those who incited others to commit crimes against humanity by the printed word, by base demagogy, had best not stake their hopes on escape.

The time for retribution has arrived. The Germans shall return everything they have plundered. For all that was burned, destroyed

and wrecked Germany shall answer. Peace for the nations of the world rests not on forgiveness but on the solid granite foundation of just retribution. The time will come when the German people will be able to look the nations of the world honestly in the eyes, when in the realm of gloom and evil, in the land governed by the laws of darkness, the land on whose walls were written the words: "Light is your death," men and women will again remember the words uttered on his deathbed by the great Goethe: "Light, more light."

February 16, 1945
First Byelorussian Front